

ZIG ZAG
THE BOY CONJURER
VICTOR ST CLAIR



ZIG-ZAG, THE BOY CONJURER

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OR

Life On and Off the Stage

BY

VICTOR ST. CLAIR

AUTHOR OF

"Zip, the Acrobat," "For Home and Honor," "From Switch to Lever,"
"Cast Away in the Jungle," etc.



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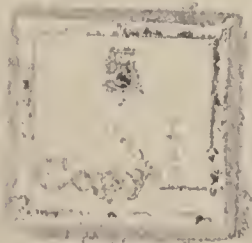
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Zig-Zag, the Boy Conjuror

Gift
Mrs. Helen Cursler
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ZIG-ZAG, THE BOY CONJURER.

CHAPTER I.

INTO TROUBLE IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

“Stand back, youngster! I tell you I have all the load I can carry.”

“I must get to Glimmerton, sir; and I must get there before half-past seven. I am not very heavy, and I will pay you——”

“If you have the money to pay with, why don’t you hire a team? I don’t run this stage to pick up every rag-shag I come across,” and the speaker closed the old coach door with a slam, and climbed laboriously to the driver’s seat.

“Nat has got so he comes in every night purty well over the bay,” declared one of the half dozen bystanders about the railroad station at Canterbury, on the C. & M. R. R., as the crusty stage driver urged his four-horse team into a smart canter, so the clumsy old vehicle which afforded the only means of public conveyance to Glim-

8 Into Trouble in Spite of Himself.

merton, a neighboring town, rocked furiously from side to side, to the imminent terror of its dozen passengers.

“Ya’as,” agreed a companion, as the little group turned away from the place, having no further interest there with the abrupt departure of the daily stage, “Nat does steam it purty stiff. He’s got to look out or Uncle Sam will take th’ job o’ carryin’ th’ mail way from him. I heerd it has been talked over to Frank P.’s store.”

The sudden departure of the spectators left the youthful person to whom the surly stage driver had addressed his depreciating remarks standing alone upon the platform, with an ill-concealed look of disappointment upon his bright, good-natured countenance.

His stature did not show him to be more than fourteen, or possibly fifteen years of age, but his face, with its firm lines around the mouth, and the thoughtful expression upon its regular features, told of at least another year on the credit side of experience in the varying fortunes of a checkered life. In fact, were we to reckon his existence from the parts he had acted in the rough side of knocking about the world, we should find that he was older than many are at two score.

“That is a pretty go!” he exclaimed under his breath.

"I have got to get there if I walk; but that would throw me all out of trim for the show to-night.

"Hello, sir!" he exclaimed, as the station agent appeared at the door of the depot, "can you tell me of a team I can get to take me to Glimmerton?"

"Glimmerton? Why, the stage has just left here. Run, and perhaps you can overtake it. The driver will stop about a mile from here to have the mail changed."

"He refused to take me, sir. He said he had too many passengers already."

"Did, eh?" And the man eyed him suspiciously. "That's funny, when he was complaining only yesterday that the travel was growing so small that he should take off a pair of horses next week."

"I don't know about that, but I must get to Glimmerton at half-past seven sure. If you will kindly tell me of some one who has a team, I shall be very thankful."

"I don't know of one you could get for love or money. You will have to foot it."

"How far is it?"

"Only about a dozen miles. You can walk it in three hours, easy enough."

"But that would make it half-past eight. I must be

there an hour before that time. I have an important engagement I must meet."

"If you can," said the station agent, as he locked the door and walked away.

"'A horse! My kingdom for a horse!'" exclaimed the youth, quoting the well-known line with a mock earnestness that brought a smile to his own lips. "Well, my situation isn't quite as desperate as that poor king's."

"Wot's all this fluster?" asked a sharp voice at his elbow, and turning quickly around, he was surprised to see a boy of about his own age, but taller and larger, with sandy hair and a freckled face. "I hope you'll 'scuse me, mister; I didn't mean to scare you, but I overheard you say you wanted to get to Glimmer in quick meter."

"To Glimmerton, yes. Can you tell me of a team?"

"What are you willing to pay?" demanded the strange youth, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and assuming the air of one doing important business.

"One dollar. If that isn't enough, I will pay more, providing I am there before half-past seven."

"A dollar and a quarter?"

"Yes. Who has the team?"

Pulling out of his vest pocket a battered specimen of a

Waterbury watch, the other fixed his gaze closely upon it for some time, and counting on his fingers, he said aloud:

"One, two, two and a half. By jupiter! I am going to do it. A dollar and a quarter don't grow on every bush, and he need not know anything about it. Say, mister, I s'pose you've got the dosh handy?"

"I am good for my bills," replied the other, displaying a handful of silver. "Come, we are losing valuable time."

"'Scuse me, mister——"

"I am called Zig-Zag, if you please."

"Sol Ginger! what a funny name! Well, Mr. Zig-Zag, you must 'scuse me for asking such questions, but him as does business must be careful how he lets strangers take him in. In the words of the philosophit, 'we have to treat all men as rogues till we prove 'em so.' My name is Budd Newbegin, and I'm a rustler from the word go. Foller me."

With these brusque and not altogether clear statements, Budd Newbegin led the way down the road, soon leaving behind the last of the few dwellings forming the little village clustering about Canterbury station.

After going about a quarter of a mile, the two came in

sight of a deserted house standing a short distance from the highway, under a clump of pines.

Near one of the trees, attached to an old skeleton wagon, Zig-Zag saw a poor-looking horse, which gave a low whinny as they approached. Evidently the creature had been standing there several hours.

"This is the rig-out," said Budd. "Spring aboard. If this hoss ain't got much style, he's got the go."

In his anxiety to get to his destination, Zig-Zag did not stop to question the ability of the horse, but climbed into the seat as Budd Newbegin had told him to do. By that time the latter had unhitched the animal, and without further delay sprang up beside his passenger.

"See him spin!" exclaimed the delighted driver, as the horse, with a very little urging, started into a smart canter. "I tell you he's a hummer!"

The road from Canterbury to Glimmerton is an extremely hilly one, and not always kept in the best state of repairs, is extremely rough and rocky. Budd, however, paid little regard to this as he urged the horse on, up hill and down, at a tremendous gait. It was already growing dusky, it being the last of the month of October, so that the sun had set before this time, and the driver made

no attempt to avoid the cobblestones scattered along the road, the wagon rattling and thumping over one obstruction and another until the riders were often nearly thrown from the rickety seat.

A sharp hill descended to Canterbury village, through which they sped like a top, Budd's yellow hair streaming out through a hole in the top of his dilapidated hat, and his feet braced against the low dashboard as if he was holding on for dear life.

Beyond the village a long, tedious hill formed a continual ascent of nearly a mile, reaching to Glimmerton south road. In climbing this ascent the horse of necessity slackened his pace, when Budd, speaking for the first time since starting, asked:

"Got folks in Glimmerton?"

"No," replied Zig-Zag. "I am going there on business. I belong to Professor Wiswell's Combination of Oriental Wonders, which is booked for an exhibition there to-night. I have been to Manchester to-day to get some chemicals for the professor, and——"

"Sol Ginger!" broke in Budd, "do you mean to say you belong to one of them traveling shows wot goes about the country having grists of fun and fooling everybody?"

"I can't say as it is as bad as that, but I belong to a traveling amusement company, and——"

"Have a fellow with you who swallows a sword, and fire, pulls handkerchiefs and ribbons out of folkses' hats, and gets red in the face and talks through a box?"

"I guess we do pretty near all you mention, and a good deal more," replied Zig-Zag. "Professor Wiswell is called the best conjurer in the country, He spent twenty years in the Orient, and he learned very many wonderful feats of the fakirs and magicians of the East."

"Can you do any of them?"

"Yes, I can do nearly all the professor can. He has been very kind in showing me."

"Golly! how I would like to be in your place. Say, I'm minded to join."

Without stopping for Zig-Zag to reply, Budd rattled on in his indiscriminate way about a matter of which it was evident he knew very little.

In the midst of this one-sided conversation, the south road was reached, when they passed the stage, which had stopped to have the mail changed at a small office. The road was descending here, so that Budd urged the horse on with increased speed.

They had not gone much farther, however, before the sounds of some one in rapid pursuit was heard above the clatter of their own flight.

“We are followed!” cried Budd, showing unexpected alarm, and whipping up the horse excitedly.

But the animal failed to increase its gait to any perceptible extent, and it soon became certain that the team following must soon overtake them.

Zig-Zag was about to ask his companion the cause of his alarm, when the latter, looking wildly back, cried:

“He has a white horse! It is Sheriff Bluffton, and he is after us! Jump for your life, or you’ll get into prison! This is a stolen team!”

Then, without checking the headlong speed of the horse, Budd Newbegin leaped wildly to the ground, flying heels over head in his passage, and leaving Zig-Zag clinging to the seat for dear life.

CHAPTER II.

A SHERIFF OUTWITTED.

Taken so completely by surprise at the singular course of action suddenly adopted by his companion, the horse had gone some distance before Zig-Zag regained his self-possession enough to seize the loosened reins, and thus check somewhat the headlong flight of the animal.

Glancing back, he could see nothing of Budd Newbegin, but he realized that the pursuing team was rapidly overtaking him.

Unable to understand what this pursuit meant, but feeling that it could in no way conflict with him, Zig-Zag quickly decided to stop until the other could come along.

Accordingly, pulling smartly on the reins, and speaking a few words to the horse, he brought the animal to a standstill, though its sides were covered with foam, and it was panting from its recent furious exertions.

The next moment the pursuing team dashed alongside, when a shrill voice commanded :

“Hold up, young man, or the worst will be your own !”

Zig-Zag saw that the wagon contained two men, one of

them looking gigantic in frame as he loomed up beside his smaller companion in the semidarkness.

"What is wanted?" demanded Zig-Zag, as yet dreaming of no harm coming to him.

"You!" retorted the burly officer, for the speaker was none other than Sheriff Bluffton, of Canterbury. "Perhaps you thought you were game enough to slide through the fingers of Pell Bluffton, but I guess you have seen your mistake. There isn't a Newbegin smart enough to do that."

"I understand," replied Zig-Zag, "you are mistaken in your person. I am not——"

"Pell Bluffton is never mistaken!" cried the officer. "You are the rascal I want, and I have got you, too. I will learn you how to steal another man's team."

"Jump out, Sawyer, and let the young reprobate get in here with me. I reckon he won't try any of his shines on me to get away."

Sheriff Bluffton said this last to his companion, who quickly sprang out of the wagon upon the ground.

"You are mistaken," repeated Zig-Zag. "My name is not Newbegin, and I have not stolen this team."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sawyer, who, now that he had

got nearer, saw that our hero was a stranger, "it is not that Newbegin scamp. It is some one I never see before.

"Small whit of difference does that make. A skunk by any other name would smell just as bad.

"Are you going to get in here with me, youngster, or shall I have to resort to this good right arm of mine?"

As Sheriff Bluffton spoke, he drew something from under the seat cushion, which Zig-Zag could see plainly enough was a revolver.

"Quick—your answer!" demanded the sheriff. "If you think I am going to fool all night with such a whippersnapper as you, you are mistaken."

By this time Zig-Zag could not help understanding the seriousness of his situation. To become the prisoner of Sheriff Bluffton would preclude the last possibility of getting to Glimmerton that night, and this he must do at all hazards. Certain articles he had in his pockets were absolutely needed by the professor in order to carry out the evening's programme. Something, too, with that strange fatality which sometimes comes to a person beyond the promptings of business, urged him to get to Glimmerton with all haste possible. He knew enough of the slow movements of the law to realize that should he

be obliged to give up his freedom, it might be several days before he could rejoin his company.

Beside these considerations, Zig-Zag felt in ill humor over Sheriff Bluffton's conduct. He had not addressed a civil word to him, nor treated him with the least show of consideration. This fact, as much as anything else, caused him to make an attempt to baffle the other's aims.

"You cannot arrest me without sufficient reason, sir, and I have done nothing wrong. I must get to Glimmer-ton before half-past seven, but if you want this team, I will walk. I had hired——"

"Shut up!" roared the officer. "I arrest you, in the name of the law, with stolen property in your possession. Pull him out of the wagon, Sawyer, and if he offers to resist, bat him over the head as you would a horsefly."

The sheriff's companion took a step forward, as if to obey the order, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"I daren't! He's making up faces at me!"

"Fire and furies!" cried Bluffton, rising to his feet, while he shook the revolver in the air, "are you a fool, Sawyer, or——"

"I didn't speak," gasped Sawyer. "Honest——"

Before the sheriff could reply, to the amazement of him-

self and confederate, a deep, guttural voice, which seemed to come from the horse, said :

“The boy did not steal me. Let him go!”

“Who spoke?” exclaimed Bluffton, growing excited.

“I did!” replied the horse, looking around at the sheriff, as Zig-Zag pulled gently on that rein.

“Zounds!” that’s mighty funny. Come, get in here with me, youngster. My man will drive that team back.”

“Never!” seemingly cried the horse. “Come near me and I will kick out your brains.”

Sheriff Bluffton was trembling from head to foot, showing that he was a coward when anything unusual opposed him.

“What is it? Who spoke? It sounded like that horse.”

“It was!” gasped the terrified Sawyer.

“If you doubt it, lay a hand on that boy,” and the horse turned his head around so he looked into the white face of the sheriff, who had sunk back upon his seat.

How he would have ended if Zig-Zag had been left to himself, I cannot tell, but the thunder of coach wheels and the clatter of horses’ feet at that moment arrested the attention of all. It soon became apparent that the stage was approaching at no natural pace, while above the tu-

mult of the wild flight rang the cries of men and women in tones of terror.

“Nat’s horses are running away with him!” cried Bluff-ton. “Clear the road! Here they come!”

The truth of the sheriff’s words was evident, for as the stage drew nearer the cries of the helpless passengers grew wilder, while it could be seen that the runaways were plunging from side to side of the road, so the vehicle was swaying to and fro at a fearful rate.

Thinking only of his own safety, the sheriff struck his horse a savage blow, causing the animal to spring into the gutter, nearly unseating him in the wagon.

Sawyer bounded into the ditch and over the adjacent wall with a celerity of which one would not have supposed him capable.

Zig-Zag followed the others’ example, so far as getting out of the path of the runaways; but with more presence of mind than they could lay claim to, he turned to see if there was nothing he could do to avert the awful catastrophe impending the occupants of the coach.

The driver was not in sight, though half a dozen heads were thrust out of the coach windows.

It seemed like madness for any one to throw himself

in front of the terrified brutes with the hope of stopping them.

As the runaways swept past the teams drawn up in the ditch, possibly frightened by them, they made a plunge into the opposite gutter, when it seemed for a moment the stage was going to be overturned.

Something checked the horses' flight for a moment, and they became tangled together in their efforts to regain the road. But the next instant they had straightened themselves out and were rushing down the descending road as madly as ever.

They carried one more passenger, however, than the old stage had contained a moment before.

Zig-Zag, as the coach had swept past him, had caught upon the baggage-rack behind the body of the vehicle, and with a nimbleness natural to him, sprang up to the rear end of the covered top. Gaining this, he crept swiftly along until he could drop upon the driver's seat.

Under the dashboard he saw the crouching figure of a man, whom he took to be the drunken driver. But Zig-Zag had too much upon his hands to give the powerless fellow more than a glance, as he looked for some way to stop the frightened horses.

The reins were lying over the backs of the rear pair, and, anxious to gain possession of them, Zig-Zag lost no time in letting himself down over the dashboard upon the tongue between the animals.

His position was one of extreme peril, but clinging to his precarious perch with the tenacity of a squirrel, he soon succeeded in getting hold of the reins. Gathering them up in his hands hastily, he climbed back to the seat, when he prepared to bring under his control the affrighted steeds.

This was an easier task than he had expected, and by the time they had gone a mile farther, he had them under complete management. Fortunately, the runaway had occurred upon a section of the road that was wide and smooth.

While Zig-Zag was speaking soothingly to the fretting horses, the stage driver seemed to have come to his senses, for, lifting up his head, he drawled:

“‘Pears me y—you driv’ ’em horses like Gabriel! Ras ’bout over?”

“Get up here if you have any manhood left about you,” said Zig-Zag, sharply. “You came near killing every one in the stage by your blundering.”

“ ‘Scuse me; I’s s—s—sorry ’bout it. Didn’t seem to have any control over ’em. Had all I c—c—could do hol’ on—fac’.”

Zig-Zag had no doubt of this, but, knowing that the passengers had not recovered from their terror, he stopped the team to assure one and all that there was no further danger.

Nothing was to be heard of the sheriff, and as he was requested to drive the stage into Glimmerton, he resolved to do so, the regular driver claiming that he had suffered a sudden fit of sickness.

He declined to go inside the coach, however, but remained by the side of Zig-Zag.

At Glimmerton Center, where the mail had to be sorted for that office, about half of the passengers left the coach. By that time Nat Benton was able to take the reins, though Zig-Zag remained beside him. The old stager had not recognized him as the boy he had refused passage at Canterbury, and our hero did not think it best to mention the matter.

At a quarter past seven the stage drove safely up to the door of the Glenwood House, where Professor Wiswell’s company was stopping, and, highly elated to find that

after all of his adventures he had got there in season, Zig-Zag jumped down to the ground.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked a man standing in the hotel doorway. "I looked for you back an hour ago."

"I came as soon as I could get here," replied Zig-Zag. "Is the professor over to the hall?"

"No. Come up to our room. I have something I want to say to you."

"As soon as I have paid my fare."

"That's all settled," said the driver. "I reckon you earned it."

Without stopping to thank the stage driver, Zig-Zag followed his friend into the house and up the stairs to their room, anticipating that something unusual had happened by his tone and manner.

"What is it?" he asked, as soon as they were alone.

"Enough, in all consciousness. The professor is dead!"

CHAPTER III.

A DISAPPOINTED AUDIENCE.

"Professor Wiswell dead?" asked Zig-Zag, unable to comprehend the other's words.

"That was what I said," replied the man, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"But he was as well as usual this morning; and only yesterday he was telling me that he had never felt better in his life."

"Nothing strange about that. Men of his temperament are often cut down without a moment's warning. I have expected it of him for a long time, and I have said as much to you time and again."

"What was the trouble?" asked Zig-Zag, his voice growing husky as he continued the unhappy conversation.

"Heart disease, of course. You yourself knew he was troubled with a heart difficulty."

"Oh, Mr. Steerly, I cannot realize what you say. This is so sudden, so unexpected!"

"Come into the next room with me and I will show you only too well the truth of my words. Of course, it seems

hard, but he had lived to a good age—sixty-five, he was telling me only last week. If I can live to that age and retain my faculties as well as he did, I will not complain.”

Zig-Zag followed his companion into an adjoining apartment without replying, and as he came in sight of the whited, silent figure, the tears filled his eyes so he could not see. Groping his way forward to the form, he placed his hand on the cold, rigid features, murmuring:

“Oh, Jack, tell me that this is all a horrible dream. My eyes are so full of tears I cannot see. Dear, dear friend, speak to me, if but one word. I cannot let you go without at least a good-by. How still it is here! You must tell me all the particulars, Jack.”

“Another day must do for that, my boy,” replied Steerly, visibly affected by his companion’s grief. “You know we have other matters demanding our immediate attention. We ought to be over to the hall now.”

“The hall—oh, the show? But that will be postponed now. Of course we shall not be expected to give that without him——” but Zig-Zag could not finish the sentence.

“His dying as he did makes it all the more necessary that we should. No one knows of his death outside of the

house; I have been careful to look after that. The people will be there—a crowded house, I am sure—and you and I must go through with the entertainment. I can do my part.”

“It isn’t that, Jack; but I could not do a thing thinking of him lying here in that way. No, no, Jack; the people will not blame us when they know the reason.”

“But there is a more urgent reason than you suspect, perhaps, why we should give the entertainment to-night. In looking over the professor’s few things just now, I was surprised to find that he had less than a dollar in money among his possessions. I fancy you haven’t much more, and I surely have even less. This affair is going to cost us considerable extra expense, and you must remember we are among strangers. So we have got to give a show to-night to get enough money to get out of town with. See?”

Zig-Zag’s grief was too great for him to understand fully what the other had said.

“What could have become of his money, Jack? You know we have been having full houses ever since we started out, two weeks ago. He must have put it where you have not found it.”

"That cannot be. I was aware he had been spending all we were taking in lately, and I will explain it to you when we have time. Come, we shall have to leave it now and go over to the hall."

"It! Oh, Jack, how that sounds! How noble he looks, even lying there with that awful expression on his face. Jack, do you know I believe he was the kindest-hearted man in the world. Now he is gone—the only friend I had!"

"I must say, you speak well of the living."

"Forgive me, Jack. I did not mean to wrong you! but you must remember he was all the father and mother I have ever known. He found me a nameless waif, and cared for me; he gave me an education and explained to me all of the great secrets which cost him years of study and research. He was always kind to me, and he has said he cared for nothing I could not share with him."

"That may be the reason you think so much of him now," said John Steerly, in a tone which seemed to convey more than the words.

Zig-Zag was too much overcome with his grief to notice this, however, as he reluctantly turned away to follow his companion out of the room.

By this time it will be understood that Mr. John Steerly and Zig-Zag formed Professor Wiswell's support in his Combination of Oriental Wonders. The first, however, had not been long with the company, and he had acted a minor part in the performances. He was not a communicative man, and all that was known by his companions of his past history was his name, and even that our hero had felt at times was assumed. Though he had never treated Professor Wiswell with any show of friendship, the other had shown him a singular confidence and respect.

The sum of Zig-Zag's history can be told in a few words. Longer ago than he could remember, Professor Wiswell had rescued him from death under the wheels of a carriage in the heart of the largest city in the world. No trace of his parents or friends could be learned by his kind benefactor, who had ever treated him as if he had been his own son. Under his personal attention, the boy had received an education equaled by only a few. He had accompanied the professor around the globe, stopping three years among the fakirs and wonderful magicians of the land of the Orient, where our hero had learned some of the remarkable feats we shall describe in coming chapters.

As might have been expected, Professor Wiswell gave his name to his *protégé*, but owing to the varying events of his checkered fortunes, he had early become known as Zig-Zag, an epithet which clung to him whether he would or no.

As if it was a part of the work of this trio to surround their lives with mystery, very little was known of Professor Wiswell's history. He had been a kind, benevolent man, completely devoted to his art, and had seemed to have passed all of his younger years in India, to become master of some of the most startling feats of sleight-of-hand performed by the most gifted servants of the East.

Fortunately, he had taught his young *protégé* nearly all the secrets, which had cost him years of patient labor to solve. And now he lay dead in a country town, surrounded by strangers, save for the twain I have mentioned, and they knew not if he had a relative in the world.

Zig-Zag and Steerly found Sinclair Hall already crowded as they entered, and still the people were coming.

"This is going to be a paying night," said the latter, as he glanced over the audience with a look of satisfaction. "I will say this much for the professor, he was a good advertiser. See," he added, as they reached the farther

end of the hall, "I have the curtain up, and everything is in readiness. Now, if you coach me a bit on some points, I shall be able to open the show in ample season. It does an audience good to be kept waiting a few minutes, for it will appreciate you better."

"Is the apparatus all here?"

"Everything. I was careful to have it all on hand, for I didn't know just what I should need to-night. Of course, the first time, I shall not be expected to go through the whole programme. These country louts will never know the difference."

They had passed "behind the scenes" by this time, and Zig-Zag looked upon his companion with wonder at his words.

"Of course, I am going to run the show now," said Steerly. "I am the older person. Why, the crowd would hoot a beardless boy from the stage. With a little help from you, at first, I have no doubt but I shall get along tiptop. At any rate, we have got their money, and if they are not satisfied let them kick; I shall never come into this howling wilderness again."

Zig-Zag was dumfounded by this unreasonable announcement.

“Of course I am willing you should go ahead, Jack, but I am in fear that you will not be able to go through enough of the programme to satisfy the audience.”

“It is not my fault that the old man was so selfish he would never tell me more. But I have not been such a blockhead as you seem to think, and if you learn it now for the first time, I will tell you I have witnessed more of these private lessons he has given you than you dream. You will find you cannot outwit me so easily.”

Zig-Zag was surprised and puzzled by this unexpected treatment from him whom he had considered his friend. But, under the circumstances, he did not feel like arguing with him. He knew the audience was getting uneasy, and he hoped, with what assistance he could lend, Steerly would be able to act a satisfactory part.

After what must have seemed a long delay to the expectant waiters, Steerly ordered the curtain to be run up, when he was greeted by a storm of applause from those who did not think he was other than the “Great Wizard from the Orient.” Bowing and smiling to the audience, while he waved the magician’s wand clumsily over his head, Steerly opened the entertainment by saying:

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I now propose to open the wizard’s banquet with a little trick to prepare you for the greater mysteries to follow. You see I hold in my hand a common hen’s egg. How many of you can spin this, large and upward? Try it, please, gentlemen. Ah, ’tis as I thought, more difficult than you thought. Now, see me. Ha, presto! there she goes!”

Steerly’s initial feat was one hardly deserving notice by an old conjurer, as the trick consisted in changing the egg offered to those of the on-lookers who would try to spin it, for another hard-boiled, which can be easily made to revolve on its small end by almost any person. He had placed the object upon a finely-japanned waiter, which he kept whirling in an opposite direction to that the egg was going, so the last was held in motion for some time.

Elated over his success so far, Steerly essayed other simple feats with more or less satisfaction, until at last he undertook the showing up of the inexhaustible hat, watched with more feverish interest by Zig-Zag from behind the scenes than by the owner of the “slick up.”

Having obtained the coveted hat, Steerly began to pull out the curious variety of articles the conjurer usually pretends to find in such an innocent receptacle, until he

had piled out upon the table an enormous amount of personal property.

Though the performer was flattering himself that he had accomplished the necessary "loading" successfully, Zig-Zag was aware that several had seen by his bungling movements how the trick was done, and were waiting their time to expose him.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Steerly, suddenly, "I feel faint and hungry. Whew, why shouldn't I, when I come to think of it? I haven't had any supper. How thoughtless of me. Well, never mind. I will cook me a bite in a jiffy. Stay; I have no pot in which to cook my soup. Oh, yes, I have, for what better vessel could I ask for than this nice, tall hat. I am very fond of pie. Now watch me closely, to see how I cook a complete supper without any fire save what I take out of this tall hat, that I am going to use for a kettle."

This was really one of Professor Wiswell's most difficult feats, and was always received with rounds of applause.

Keeping up a continual stream of words, for the successful conjurer must do this, Steerly went on with his

arrangements, until he took a glass of water from the table, saying :

“Now, gentlemen, of this tea I will make a cup of water—no—no, I mean——” but swinging the glass about his head as he spoke, somehow he sent inadvertently its entire contents over the occupants of the first seat, when a howl ensued.

“Never mind trifles !” said the actor, with an exasperating smile. “I will forego the pleasure of a cup of tea this time. It is apt to give me a headache. Now, see me pour in the fixings for the soup.”

At this juncture Zig-Zag tried to catch Steerly’s eye, for he saw that the other had failed to prepare for this part of the trick by putting a “tin lining” in the hat. The would-be magician saw his mistake in an instant, and a cry of horror left his lips as he realized that he had spoiled the hat.

“He has ruined it !” cried the owner, leaping to his feet. “They are humbugs and swindlers !”

“Put them out of the house !” yelled others, until the hall rang with the cries.

Then the excited mob started toward the conjurers, whose every avenue of escape was cut off.

“They will kill us!” exclaimed the terrified Steerly, springing behind the curtain just as a cloud of missiles fell upon the platform.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOY CONJURER.

It was a critical moment to the conjurers, and had not Zig-Zag possessed more presence of mind and forethought than the baffled Steerly, I am afraid my history of the young conjurer would have had a tragical ending.

As his companion retreated with cries of terror, Zig-Zag bounded upon the stage, and, picking up the wand Steerly had dropped in his fright, he waved the emblem of the magician's power over his head, while he shouted :

“Shade of my father, arise and stay this mad mob !”

Scarcely had the words rung out above the tumult of the crowd, when to the amazement of one and all a ghostly figure suddenly appeared upon the opposite end of the stage.

At sight of this uncanny form, which seemed to tower above the head and shoulders of any mortal there, the spectators paused in their uprising.

“Shades of thy fathers, stand back !” commanded the ghostly visitant, in a deep, sepulchral tone, which sent a

shiver through the bodies of the on-lookers, as they sank back into their seats.

“Oh!” cried Steerly, at that moment catching sight of the sheeted figure, “it is the ghost of Watterson Wiswell!”

With this startling declaration, he sprang across the stage and down one of the aisles toward the door, a wild, scared look upon his features.

No one thought of trying to stop him, and the next moment he left the hall, the sound of his footsteps, as he leaped down the stairs three or four at a time, echoing back upon that strangely silent scene with an impressive effect.

Zig-Zag realized that no ordinary feat of legerdemain could recover the lost confidence of the angry crowd. Accordingly he resolved to show that night the best of which he was capable.

Paying no attention to the flight of his companion, he looked calmly over his audience, and then turned toward the mysterious figure at the farther end of the stage.

“Sirrah!” he cried, in feigned displeasure, “what means this intrusion?”

The spectators gazed spellbound upon the strange sight,

without knowing what to expect. Then, to their dismay, the weird object replied:

“Young man, I could not rest and such shame falling upon my mantle.”

“Good father, ’twere not my fault that the wand fell into the hands of a novice this once.”

“Then redeem yourself,” said the sepulchral voice of the shadowy form, “else never put on again the mantle of the king of magicians from the Orient.”

“I will, good father! and you shall prove my skill. See, this charmed blade, once the mighty wand of the great White Sheik, shall sever thee in twain but never lose itself in thy unseemly form.”

While speaking, Zig-Zag, with a wild, fierce look upon his countenance, strode toward the ghostly speaker, and making a sharp lunge, ran the sword through his body.

Ay, the weapon did pass completely through the other’s form, for its point stood out a hand’s span behind his back, but the blade was in plain sight its entire length!

Awe-stricken, the spectators saw the boy conjurer move the two-edged sword back and forth in his attempt to carry out his threat.

“Ha! ha!” laughed the victim, the hollow, mirthless

cry seeming to fill the hall with its unearthly intonations, "your nerve is good, and your blade is sharp, but I cannot feel it. Look! yonder window!"

In a moment every eye in the audience was turned swiftly in the direction indicated by the ghostly speaker, though they failed to detect any unusual sight.

"Away! vanish, thou unwelcome guest!" shouted Zig-Zag. "I have no desire for thy company."

Their attention called back to the stage, all were amazed to see the young conjurer standing in front of them smiling and alone. Whither the spectral visitor had fled or how, or what he had been, they knew not.

Zig-Zag no longer held the glistening sword in his hand, but the wand was still in his possession.

Moving the latter gently to and fro, he addressed the wondering crowd in his clear, silvery voice, which fell like the soft rippling of running water upon their ears:

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, that our ghostly friend has kindly departed, I will begin the evening's entertainment by showing you a few of the marvelous feats and performances it has been my good fortune to have witnessed as done by the great magicians of India under the walls of the Towers of Silence.

"Now, excuse me," he said, as his eye rested upon the ruined hat which had caused the interruption, "before I begin I must show you that I can make myself useful as well as ornamental by repairing this hat my friend came so near spoiling. Watch me closely, for this secret may be worth many times your admission fee to you, and I am only too glad to do this extra service."

He had picked up the hat and was closely examining it.

"It is a bad case," he continued, "but the owner need not be a bit concerned, for I will soon return him his 'slick up' as good as new. I see I shall have to cut it into pieces, however, that I may more easily get at it. Where are my scissors? Never where I can get them. Has any one a pocketknife to lend me a moment!"

Receiving the desired knife from one of the boys on the front row of seats, Zig-Zag, while he kept up an incessant stream of small talk, cut and tore the hat into bits, laying each one carefully out on the table.

I will not attempt to describe the feeling of its owner, but an audible murmur ran over the audience, which seemed to bear a menace to the peace of the young conjurer, who next began to apply some liquid from a convenient bottle upon the soiled portions of the hat.

Holding up each part as he rubbed it with the liquid, he invariably commented favorably upon the success of his work, until finally he declared:

“Now, I can’t see why that isn’t as bright as ever, and I know the gentleman will be pleased with what I have done. I will carefully wrap the pieces in this clean paper, and he can take them home to put them in shape at his leisure.”

At this audacious announcement a titter came from the younger portion of the audience, while more than one of the others scowled and “looked daggers” at the boy conjurer.

Then, before the gaze of the anxious spectators, Zig-Zag carefully wrapped the mutilated remains of the hat in a sheet of coarse paper, saying, as he finished:

“Now, I wonder how I shall get this hat to the gentleman? Ah, I have it; I will summon a little bird to take it to him. Watch me closely while I call my servant.”

With these words Zig-Zag formed his hands into a funnel shape, and with the package exposed to the gaze of all, held his hands to his mouth, when he blew into the space between them with all his might.

Immediately following his second attempt the package

seemed to dissolve, several sheets of paper and a light vapor floated out upon the air, from which a small bird flew swiftly over their heads across the room.

Fluttering in the air for a few moments, the tiny, winged messenger darted swiftly back and disappeared behind the curtain, while the on-lookers remained staring at the space it had suddenly left.

“Good!” cried the boy conjurer, “I see the gentleman has recovered his hat all right. Of course we will excuse him for wearing it in the house under the peculiar circumstances of the case.”

Glancing in the direction indicated by the young conjurer, judge of the amazement of every one to see that Dr. Brandon’s silk hat was resting safely upon his head!

Putting up his hand almost unconsciously, the worthy M. D. seemed more surprised than the rest at the discovery. Hastily removing the hat, the smile and look of relief which came over his features told plainer than words that the valuable tile had come back to him uninjured.

Then the spell was broken.

Huzzas, wild and thrilling, filled Sinclair Hall, until the walls rang as they never had before with the applause

of a delighted audience. Loud and long the cheering continued, until it seemed they would never stop.

Zig-Zag was now master of the situation. No one doubted him now, or his ability to do whatever he should undertake.

Going to the front of the stage, he bowed low to the excited people, and thanked them for their appreciation of his efforts, as soon as he could make himself heard, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and gray heads nodded sagely toward him.

It was one of the proudest moments of the young conjurer's life. He was in good spirits to follow up his advantage, which he did by saying:

"Next, ladies and gentlemen, I will amuse you by a little trick of the vanishing glass of water. Of course the glass does not vanish at all, but you will think so, and the effect will be the same. See, I have here a plain glass filled two-thirds full with clear brook water. Of course spring water would do just as well, or water from a well would answer my purpose, so I don't want you to think that it's the kind of water upon which I depend for the little deception I am about to practice upon you. Oh, no, not at all."

“But I do need the services of a steady-handed young man to help me. Rather, I am going to depend upon him to spirit away the glass, providing I find him honest. If there is such a person in the hall as I have described, he will please come forward.”

“Sol Ginger! won’t I do, mister?” asked a voice from the rear of the hall, and then Budd Newbegin came shuffling slowly down the main aisle.

CHAPTER V.

ILLUSION, DELUSION AND MYSTERY.

“Perhaps you will do,” replied Zig-Zag, eying the newcomer closely, as if he had not seen him before.

“What is your address?”

“Overhauls the year round, sir! Marm makes ’em for me,” retorted the imperturbable Budd, looking up with a comical gravity at the roar of laughter which followed his words.

The boy conjurer had placed the glass of water upon the table near the farther edge, and as Budd stepped upon the platform, he began to shake out a silk handkerchief, when, holding it up so the spectators could see both sides, he said :

“I don’t know about your handling the glass without spilling its contents, for if we spill any of the water the charm is gone. To be on the safe side, I will lay this handkerchief over the top.”

Upon saying this the young conjurer lifted the object from the table by the upper part so the audience could see it.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Zig-Zag, as he brushed his disengaged hand across the silk, "I have spilled the water myself. But not enough of the precious fluid is lost to do any harm, I think. At any rate, we will see."

"Mr. Overhauls, I want you to take this glass to that young lady wearing the brown dress, and seated on the front seat. Be careful and not spill it, for that would put you in an awkward plight."

As he spoke he held out the object, and as Budd reached his hand to take the glass Zig-Zag deftly snatched the handkerchief away, and stepped back as if his part of the task was over. After a moment, seeing that the other did not start to carry out his directions, he demanded:

"Why don't you do as I told you? Never keep a young lady waiting."

"You ain't gin me the glass!" said Budd.

"Haven't given you the glass? Why, how dare you say that, when every person in the house saw me hand it to you?"

"I ain't got it, and I ain't had it!" protested Budd.

"That's too thin. If you had told me you wanted the glass of water, I would have given it to you. But I don't like to be deceived in this way."

Then Zig-Zag looked more closely upon the other, and smiling as if he had made an important discovery, he added :

“Please excuse me; I see what has caused the trouble. You have water on the brain.”

“What?” gasped Budd, showing excitement.

“Don’t be alarmed, for I can quickly take it off. I understand what has become of that glass of water. Allow me to place this handkerchief over your head, so as to keep the cold air from rushing in at the cavity from whence I am going to extract that tumbler and its contents.”

Budd Newbegin was trembling from head to foot, while the spectators were gazing intently upon the two.

“Will it hurt?” asked the victim.

“Only for a moment. Stand perfectly still so as not to spill the water.”

The boy conjurer then laid the handkerchief lightly over the other’s head, and began to move his hand back and forth upon it.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, after he had done this a few times, “it’s just as I thought. Yours is a bad case of water on the brain, and that glass has gone to it as

naturally as life. Still I think I am in season to remove the glass safely.

"Watch me closely," he continued, turning toward the audience, when he lifted the handkerchief up, displaying the glass under it as he held it out to the spectators.

"Of course we will forgive you for taking the glass in that way, young man, but I shall be careful not to place such a temptation in your way again."

Hearty applause followed the consummation of this trick, while Budd looked decidedly sheepish.

This performance was really a very simple affair, when the way it was done is told, and the victim could not help wondering that he had been "taken in" so easily.

The fact was Zig-Zag had two glasses exactly alike, and filled alike with water. The one was in his pocket, covered with a rubber top, and the other he had placed on the table in sight of the audience. The handkerchief was really two sewed together at the edges, with a ring fastened near the middle, the last being the size of the tops of the glasses. So when he lifted the silk up by the ring its sides fell down so they gave the shape of the glass, which he had slipped from under it into the secret drawer made for such purposes.

The great secret of the conjurer's success is to keep the spectators from looking toward his hands, a thing which he never does while performing. Thus he keeps up an incessant flow of conversation to cover his work.

Now then, with a glass of water in his pocket as I have told, Zig-Zag, as he lifted the handkerchief from Budd's head, had no trouble during the excitement of the moment to slip the rubber cover from the tumbler in his pocket with his free hand, and give the appearance of having taken it from under the silk covering.

But as the conjurer never for a moment lags in his work, as that would be often fatal to his success, Zig-Zag passed swiftly to another of his marvelous feats, and from this to something altogether unexpected and pleasing, keeping the house in a continual roar of merriment.

His magic wand moved with more than common celerity, and right here I would say that this very simple looking little stick plays a most important part in the work of a conjurer. It is what the baton is to the conductor of an orchestra. Ay, it is of more account, for it helps to conceal innumerable little devices and tricks; it is a cover for a host of necessary movements which would otherwise seem awkward, and it might be awaken suspicion.

Zig-Zag's wand was of a most unique pattern, fashioned after the conjuring sticks of the fakirs of India, and had been a present to Professor Wiswell from an aged magician in the Orient, and he had given it, with his blessing, to our hero.

Needing some one to wait upon him, Zig-Zag retained the not unwilling Budd Newbegin upon the stage, until his last bewildering performance pronounced him to the audience to be the king of wizards, and amid their plaudits he bade them a gracious "good-night."

"By jimminywhack!" exclaimed Budd, "hain't it greater'n all creation. I never expected to be such a big man as this. Say, Mister Zig-Zag, I want you to just 'splain it all to me so I can shake 'em up."

"How came you here?" asked Zig-Zag, as he began to clear up and pack away his apparatus.

"B'gosh, I hooked it here; and I didn't let any grass grow under my heels, either. Wouldn't missed it for a thousand dollars."

"But how about that horse? You got me into a pretty scrape."

"Sho! B'gosh, I didn't think old Bluffton was coming after us, did you?"

"It seems you had stolen the team."

"I didn't look at it that way. That hoss had stood there hitched to that pine for two whole hours, when it would have been better for him to be exercised. Can't see why they should kick just cos I was trying to help a fellow along."

Further explanation on the part of Budd was checked by the appearance of the landlord of the Hotel Glenwood.

"Mr. Wiswell, I wish you would come over to the house as soon as possible. That man who came with you may be all right, but he is acting rather singular, according to my judgment."

"I will be right over, Mr. Preston," replied Zig-Zag, who for the time being had quite forgotten Mr. Steerly.

"You don't expect to go back to Canterbury to-night, Budd?" asked Zig-Zag, as he resumed the work of gathering up his apparatus preparatory to returning to the hotel.

"Can't," said Budd, laconically. "Say, why can't I stay with you—I mean right along? There must be oceans of fun in this business."

"Something besides fun you will find. What could you do?"

"More'n you could shake a stick at. B'gosh! I'd like to see 'em tricks every night."

"I will talk with you later," replied Zig-Zag, who had already decided to give the other a trial, as he must have some one to go with him, particularly if Steerly should leave him.

Our hero kept busy while talking with his companion in preparing the things for removal, and he had just succeeded in placing the last article in position, as the janitor rushed up to him, saying:

"Mr. Preston seems very anxious for you to come over to the hotel at once. I think something unusual must be taking place, for he is the last man to get so excited."

"I am going now. Here, Budd, keep watch over these things until I get back, and I will give you half a dollar, providing they are not disturbed. I won't be gone long."

"And you can count on me for keeps," answered Budd.

Losing no further time, Zig-Zag followed the janitor out of the hall, and together the twain went across the street, and passing over a small common reached the Glenwood House.

"Perhaps I have done wrong in disturbing you and

your business," said Mr. Preston, as he met the boy conjurer at the door, "but that fellow Steerly is acting queer. The last I saw of him he went into the room the professor hired for himself, and I have a suspicion that he is up to some mischief, though I don't know as I have any reason for saying so."

Without stopping to reply, Zig-Zag ran up the stairs to the chamber in question, to find the door locked.

He then called Mr. Steerly by name, without eliciting any answer.

"If you haven't any key," said the landlord, "here is one. It is your duty to make an entrance into the room."

Taking the proffered key, Zig-Zag quickly applied it to the lock, and turning it around opened the door without further trouble.

Not very much to his surprise, the room was empty!

CHAPTER VI.

SINGULAR CONDUCT OF STEERLY.

"The bird has flown!" exclaimed the landlord, showing considerable excitement. "I knew there was something wrong about his actions. He should be hunted down at once."

Zig-Zag's attention had been arrested by the disordered appearance of the apartment. Professor Wiswell's clothes were scattered about the floor in a most promiscuous way, and thrown carelessly upon the rumpled bed was a wooden box, or a sort of miniature chest, which the young conjurer had seen in his possession since he could first remember him.

"Somebody has looted the room!" cried Zig-Zag. "The professor's private papers and treasures are gone. There is nothing left but this box, which seems to be filled with small handbills."

"It's the work of Steerly!" exclaimed the landlord. "I will summon the sheriff and have him arrested if you say so, Mr. Wiswell."

"Not yet," replied Zig-Zag; "I don't understand what

all this means. Are you sure Mr. Steerly is not about the house?"

"Quite sure, though I will see if he can be found."

With these words Mr. Preston hastened to make a thorough investigation of the premises, while the boy conjurer continued his examination of the room.

There could be no doubt but the apartment had been hastily ransacked and everything of value taken, except the wearing apparel of the dead man, and the box found upon the bed.

The last Zig-Zag kept, resolved that it should not pass from his possession, unless it was required by law.

"I am sure Mr. Wiswell had some valuable papers," he said, half aloud, "and what John Steerly wanted of them is a mystery to me. I am sure they concerned me more than him. Poor professor! This seems too bad!"

By this time the landlord had returned from a vain search for the missing man.

"It's just as I told you at first. He has flown, and while we have been fooling around here he has got out of town. By the way, though it is none of my business, I would like to ask if you know that he has taken the funds paid at the door for admission to your show?"

"They are still in the hands of the doorkeeper, I suppose," replied Zig-Zag. "I have been too busy to look after the matter."

"Well, it is too late now. I have been told but a minute ago that this same Steerly asked for them, and got them, too."

"Impossible!"

"Mr. Woodbury is below and he will tell you it is a fact. He had begun to think he ought to have held them a little longer. But Steerly hired him to sell the tickets, so of course he thought it was all right."

"I don't understand it," said Zig-Zag. "Professor Wiswell has always had faith in him and trusted him."

"That may be, but it is evident that he trusted him too far. Now, while we are speaking of this matter, I want to say that the death of Professor Wiswell occurred under very suspicious circumstances. At noon, the last time I saw him, he appeared as well as any one, and at a quarter past four this Steerly rushed into my office saying that he was dead.

"I came here immediately, and sure enough, he was past anything we could do for him. But I am going to tell you that no such affair is going to take place in my

house without an investigation. I have seen that the body has been given proper care, and put trustworthy watchers to look after it. To-morrow morning I shall summon the selectmen and demand a coroner's inquest. At least the reputation of my house requires that much."

Zig-Zag thanked him for his forethought, but as yet he could realize nothing clearly. Professor Wiswell's death had come so suddenly, and Steerly's unexpected conduct had worked so against him that he did not know what to do.

"I must go back to the hall to look after the apparatus," he said to the landlord. "I won't be gone long. At least that part of our property is left me."

"I will call the boy to go over with you if you need any help," offered Mr. Preston.

"No, I thank you. The youth I left to look after the things will be all the assistance I shall need," replied Zig-Zag, as he started on his errand.

Zig-Zag was about halfway across the common, and in sight of the Sinclair Building, which could be seen plainly in the starlight, when he was startled by a sharp outcry from the hall.

Quickening his pace to a run, he had nearly reached the

building, which stood with an end toward the street, when he was amazed to hear the sounds of a fierce struggle going on within.

Bounding up the stairs three at a leap, he had barely gained the second floor as a crash of glass and a louder cry rang on the air.

"Go it, old boots, lickety-split!" cried the shrill voice of Budd Newbegin, as Zig-Zag entered the hall, to see him standing at the opposite part, with a wild, triumphant look upon his features, while he shook in the air a piece of dark cloth.

"What has happened, Budd?" cried the boy conjurer, excitedly.

"Hullo! hullo, Zig! Is that you?" asked the surprised Budd.

"Yes; what has happened? What have you thrown through that window?"

"Oh, nothing but a galoot as come in here to get his finger on 'em playthings of yours. I told him to let 'em alone, and he said 'git out!' when I just put him out the winder. Ain't going to have no fooling where I am doing business. See?"

"Who was it, Budd?"

“Dunno. Here’s his coat—leastways a part of it, which he tore off trying to git away from me,” said Budd, holding up the tattered remnant of what had once been one side and a sleeve to that garment.

“It is Steerly’s coat!” exclaimed Zig-Zag, with unfeigned surprise.

“Don’t keer if it’s Cowly’s, when a feller comes a-nosing around me in that way he’s got to be a rustler from the top to git ahead of me.”

“Tell me all about it, Budd. And did he get any of the apparatus?”

“What do you take me for?” and from Budd’s rather mixed account of the affair, Zig-Zag found that Steerly had entered the hall, and finding him there alone had demanded the apparatus, whereupon Budd had refused him and ordered him out of the building. Finding he could not get possession of the coveted articles by persuasion, Steerly had attempted to overpower the stanch watcher, to be himself overcome. Then, doubtless hearing the approach of the boy conjurer he had leaped out of the window.

“He must have been killed by such a fall,” said Zig-Zag. “We had better see what has happened to him.”

Going to the window and looking out, he saw that Steerly had evidently escaped any very serious injury, for he was nowhere to be seen.

"Is he there?"

"I do not see him."

"Mebbe he hasn't stopped yet. It was an awful boost. But look here. These papers fell out of his pocket. You can have 'em, though I claim the coat."

As Zig-Zag eagerly took the papers handed him by his companion, he saw that there was something written on them in the hand of Professor Wiswell.

Before he had more than glanced at the writing, however, the janitor of the hall entered the room, exclaiming:

"I wonder if I am going to be allowed to shut up this building before morning? Usually I am allowed to lock up when the show is over."

"Pardon me," said Zig-Zag, "I have had so much to trouble me I could not well clear up before. But I am done now, and you may close the hall."

"Come, Budd, help me carry the apparatus over to the hotel."

"Such of it as you do not care to move will be safe here," declared the janitor; "and you can get it in the

morning. I live at the house below the hotel. I will see that everything is fastened securely."

Zig-Zag felt obliged to accept this offer, and taking all that he and Budd could carry, which comprised the more important portions of the apparatus, he led the way back to the hotel.

"You will have to stop with me to-night, Budd," said the boy conjurer. "In the morning we will see what arrangements we can make for our mutual benefit."

"Ain't we friends?" asked Budd, suddenly.

"Friends? Of course, if I find you are honest, as I think you are, and disposed to do what is right. Why did you ask that question?"

"'Cos didn't you say we should have to maul each other for fits?"

"Hardly," replied Zig-Zag, suppressing a laugh. "I meant we would talk the matter over and see what was best to do."

"Sho! Say, I want to buy fifty cents' worth of 'em tricks for the half dollar you owe me."

"I will make that all right, and pay you the money besides, as soon as we get to our room."

"Ain't you going to follow up the chap as tried to steal your trick machines?"

"Not now. Please say nothing about the matter at the hotel. It would do no good. Of course the fellow will clear out and we shall not be troubled with him again."

By this time they had reached the hotel to be met at the door by Mr. Preston.

"I suppose you want to take them things right up to your room, Mr. Wiswell."

"Yes, sir."

"All O. K., follow me. I do not suppose you will object to the one the professor was to have. If you prefer you can have the one adjoining it, which was the one Steerly had engaged for you and him."

Though he could not have given any tangible reason for doing so, Zig-Zag said:

"If it is all the same to you, I will take the last. My friend here, Mr. Newbegin, will stop with me."

"Very well. That scamp Steerly took one key with him, which I don't suppose I shall ever see again. But here's another. I wish you no further trouble and a good night's rest, Mr. Wiswell. I will see that everything remains all right in the other apartments," he added, significantly.



"Several sheets of paper and a light vapor floated out upon the air, from which a small bird flew."

(See page 44)

Thanking him, Zig-Zag took the key, and accompanied by Budd, went up the stairs to the room they were expecting to occupy.

“This must be the one,” he said, as he unlocked the door. “At last——”

He did not finish the sentence, for he had barely crossed the threshold, when he started back with a low cry of amazement at finding himself confronted by the last person he would have thought of meeting there.

It was John Steerly!

CHAPTER VII.

ZIG-ZAG PUZZLED AND STARTLED.

It would be difficult to say which was the more surprised, Zig-Zag or Steerly, as the former opened the door.

“What do you want?” demanded Steerly; “and what is all this rumpus about?”

“I think, Mr. Steerly, you are the person to answer your own questions. I don’t understand what you mean by this treatment of me.”

“Treatment of you? If any one has any reason to complain, it is I over your dastardly conduct. You got me into a pretty mess over to the hall, didn’t you? But it is a long road which has no turn. Who is that with you?” he went on, as he caught sight of Budd.

“No one you need fear without cause. Where have you been?”

“How long has it been your business to overlook my actions? But to set your mind at rest, I will say that I have been here, in this room, all of the evening, when I have not been at the hall.”

“B’gosh!” exclaimed Budd, it’s the chap I yanked the

coat off'n! Hullo, mister! don't you want the rest of your clothes?" holding out the tattered remnant of Steerly's coat.

"Send him away!" exclaimed Steerly, angrily. "I don't know what you mean by bringing him here. Send him away, I say, and come in here where you and I can talk. I have much I want to say to you."

Zig-Zag hesitated but a moment, when he said:

"You may go into the next room, Mr. Newbegin, and remain there until I come. I will be in directly."

Showing considerable reluctance, Budd obeyed.

"Now that we are alone, Mr. Steerly, I trust you will explain the meaning of your conduct."

"All you seem to think of is what I have or haven't done," uttered the other. Then, his manner becoming more agreeable, as Zig-Zag closed the door and sank into the nearest seat, he continued: "I do not wish to throw any semblance of mystery over my actions, and I am willing you should know that as soon as I left the hall I came directly to this room, and here I have been ever since."

"Do you mean the time you left the hall during the show, or since——"

"Both, if you please to make a distinction. I came here

the first time, and then, when you had got through with your performance, I went back to help you get the apparatus, with what result you seem to know. Ah, I am inclined to think you put the dog up to it. It was a contemptible trick, anyway, and we'll see how much you gain by it. You may find that my friendship is as necessary to you as yours is to me."

"You have the door fee?" asked Zig-Zag, unheeding the other's last word.

"I have; and why should I not have it? It belongs as much to me as you; ay, more, as I shall soon show."

"I am not objecting to that, but I do not like the way you entered Professor Wiswell's room and overhauled——"

"I enter the professor's room!" cried Steerly, springing to his feet. "Excuse me, you have learned just enough to make you suspicious. I do not blame you, but I was going to speak to you about the disgraceful affair. It was the shameful work of that landlord!"

"Mr. Preston?" inquired Zig-Zag, with amazement. "That cannot be."

"It is so, and I know it. More than that, there are suspicious circumstances concerned with our friend's death,

which demand attention. He appeared well enough, except for a thirst he felt, when I went to the landlord for a cup of tea. In less than three minutes after the poor man had drunk a portion of the concoction, he was dead! I have saved some of the liquid in a bottle here, and I am going to have it analyzed at the first opportunity. I knew from the moment I put my eyes on that man he was a villain."

"I cannot realize he would commit such a crime. What could have been his object?"

"I cannot answer that question any more than I can some others I might ask. But I will tell you what I will do; in the morning I will accuse him of it in your presence, when we can both witness the result. A man's guilt will generally show itself in spite of himself. What do you say?"

"I don't know what to say. Mr. Preston seems like an honest person."

"Let's drop him for a few moments, as I want to ask you what we are going to do. This unfortunate affair has put us into a bad plight, but if we pull together I see no reason why we should not come out whistling. It is evident from your success to-night that you can give a

show which will satisfy a country audience. You can count upon me to help you all in my power, and as soon as I have perfected myself in some of my weak places now I will take the burden from your shoulders. What do you say, shall we pull together?"

Zig-Zag was never more surprised in his life than by this unexpected approach of Steerly. The man's manner had undergone a wonderful change, and he spoke in a pleasant tone, as if he had only the interest of both at his heart.

"Of course I acknowledge I was hasty in trying so much to-night, but I promise not to repeat the offense. I can raise money enough to leave his body in the undertaker's care, and he will see that it has proper burial. In that way we can go along as if nothing had happened. I will take the risks of the concern, and hire you by the month, paying you a handsome salary, so you will have nothing to fret you. Is not this fair?"

"You seem to forget, Mr. Steerly, that this business was Professor Wiswell's, not ours. He owned every cent's worth of the apparatus. We have no right to take it and handle it as if it was our own. There may be heirs some-

where to claim it all, and who will hold us responsible for it."

"Bah! who is going to be any wiser for what they can learn of the work done in this little country town? Of course," he added, seeing that what he had said did not find favor with his companion, "it is not our place to hunt up unlikely relatives who have not cared enough about the old man to look after him when he was living. It isn't probable there is a person in the world who cares whether Watterson Wiswell is living or dead."

"John Steerly, how can you say that? He was all that a father could be to me, and I shall ever——"

"Excuse me, of course I excepted you in your strange infatuation. He was kind to you, and it would be ungrateful if you did not cherish his memory."

"But this is foreign to the proposition I have made to you, and which you have not answered. When a man drops out of the world, another steps into his shoes and carries on the work he laid down. In this place, of course, it is my duty to assume the burden the professor has borne. I will see that you do not lose by the change. As a guarantee of what I will do for you, I will agree to pay you forty dollars a month and your expenses for your

services. A boy of your age ought to be glad of such an opportunity.

“In that case I shoulder all the risks, and we can go ahead as if nothing had occurred to alter the original plans. What do you say?”

“You seem to ignore the fact, Mr. Steerly, that I have any interest in the company.”

“Company? You have an interest? Of course you have, but not in a pecuniary way as I have. I do not suppose you know it, but the professor was owing me more than he was worth if such trash as he had could be given a market value. I had hoped I should not be forced to speak of this now.”

“Professor Wiswell must have left some papers which would throw light upon his business. I am——”

“So he must, but that dishonest landlord has seized them, though for what reason I cannot understand. In the morning, if you will go with me, I will demand them of him, and if he don’t hand them over we will have him arrested.

“Here are the notes I hold against the name of Professor Wiswell,” added Steerly, displaying three or four

sheets of paper in his hand. "Perhaps you prefer to wait until morning before you accept my offer."

"I do. I can think of nothing clearly now. I will see you then. Mr. Newbegin is waiting for me, and I will remain with him the rest of the night."

Zig-Zag found Budd anxiously awaiting him in the next room.

"Still up, Budd? It is time you were in bed."

"B'gosh! I don't know about going to bed 'tall. Say, I have got a conundrum for you to answer."

"I can't stop for anything of that kind, Budd, if I could fix my thoughts upon it. I have weightier matters upon my mind. Please go to bed, while I look over these papers, and try and decide what is best for me to do. I will follow you soon."

Zig-Zag had taken the crumpled sheets of paper from his pocket which Steerly had dropped in his headlong escape from Sinclair Hall.

There were three of these sheets, two of foolscap size, and the other a trifle smaller. The latter was the first to receive his attention, and as he smoothed it out upon the table, he saw that one side was covered with writing in a

strange hand. With little difficulty he read the following incomplete message :

“CELL 10 A, Sept. 16.

“MY DEAR WIFE AND BABY BOY: I know not if you will get this, but I trust and hope it may find you. Under what circumstances I dare not anticipate. How desolate is my own heart I cannot describe. This disgrace—this suffering—seems more than I can bear, and what with all you must endure it seems I must beat out my brains against the cold walls of this horrible den. Only one thought lifts my mind from absolute despair—I am innocent; and one dream cheers me even in my loneliness—the world may some time know it. But I must not dwell too long upon this, for I have much of greater importance to say. Like a vision the truth has come to me and——”

There it ended, the writer having reached the bottom of the paper. The upper right-hand corner of the sheet had been torn off, so the date line and that above it were incomplete.

Hoping the other sheets might throw some light upon the mystery, Zig-Zag turned to one of them, which he found to his surprise was covered with the well-known chirography of Professor Wiswell. It was evidently one of several, for it bore the folio number of “6.” With what interest may be imagined, he read :

* * * “what feelings I gazed on that scene cannot be described. She looked more beautiful than ever. She

had drawn the easy rocker I had given her at our last anniversary to the side of the table next to the window where she sat sewing as I had seen her so many times in the happy years gone by. In my chair sat a stranger. But I did not give him a second glance, as I looked for our baby—little golden-haired Ora. Then a mist seemed to come over my eyes, as I sought for our darling in vain. The little arm-chair could not be seen. Could it be possi——”

With trembling hand Zig-Zag picked up the last sheet, but a shade of disappointment came over his features, as he saw thereon only this :

“LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF WATTER-
SON WISWELL.”

“Conscious of the uncertainty of life, and being in sound mind——”

Was anything more perplexing? This, like the second sheet, was in the professor's hand, and was without doubt a discarded sheet he had used in making, or beginning to make, his will. Was the other a leaf from his life history? If so, where were the rest? And who had written the first paper? He studied the writing more carefully, without discovering any familiar traces.

His mind filled with conflicting thoughts, he lay down

upon the couch beside Budd, to soon sink into an uneasy slumber.

How long he had slept he could not tell, when he was aroused by a loud thumping upon the door:

“Who is there? and what is wanted?” he demanded, starting up.

“It is I—Preston! Come out here as quick as you can. That body is gone!”

CHAPTER VIII.

TRACES OF THE MISSING TRUNK.

“Professor Wiswell’s body gone?” asked Zig-Zag, unable to comprehend the other’s startling statement.

“Yes; I want to know what all this means! Are you coming out at once?”

“Yes, sir.”

Zig-Zag had sprung out of bed, and slipping on his pants, he opened the door for the landlord who was trembling as if undergoing great excitement.

“I don’t understand it!” he said. “It was there all right at midnight, but the next time Dalton, the watcher, went into the room, which could not have been two hours later, the body was missing. Of course it could not have got away without help.”

“Have you spoken to Mr. Steerly?”

“Hello! what means this disturbance?” demanded the well-known voice of Steerly himself before Mr. Preston could reply, while the former stepped out into the hall from his room.

The landlord quickly explained the situation to the other, who seemed scarcely less surprised than Zig-Zag.

"Of course the thing did not get up and walk out of the house," he said. "Dead men don't generally do that. Some one has removed the body."

"Who?" asked the landlord.

"Let us examine the room where it was left," said Steerly. "It may have slipped upon the floor and be lying concealed under something which has escaped your gaze. No doubt you were excited when you looked."

Mr. Preston led the way into the apartment which had been set apart for the dead, without replying.

If Steerly really expected to prove his words, he was disappointed, for search where they would, no trace of the body could be found.

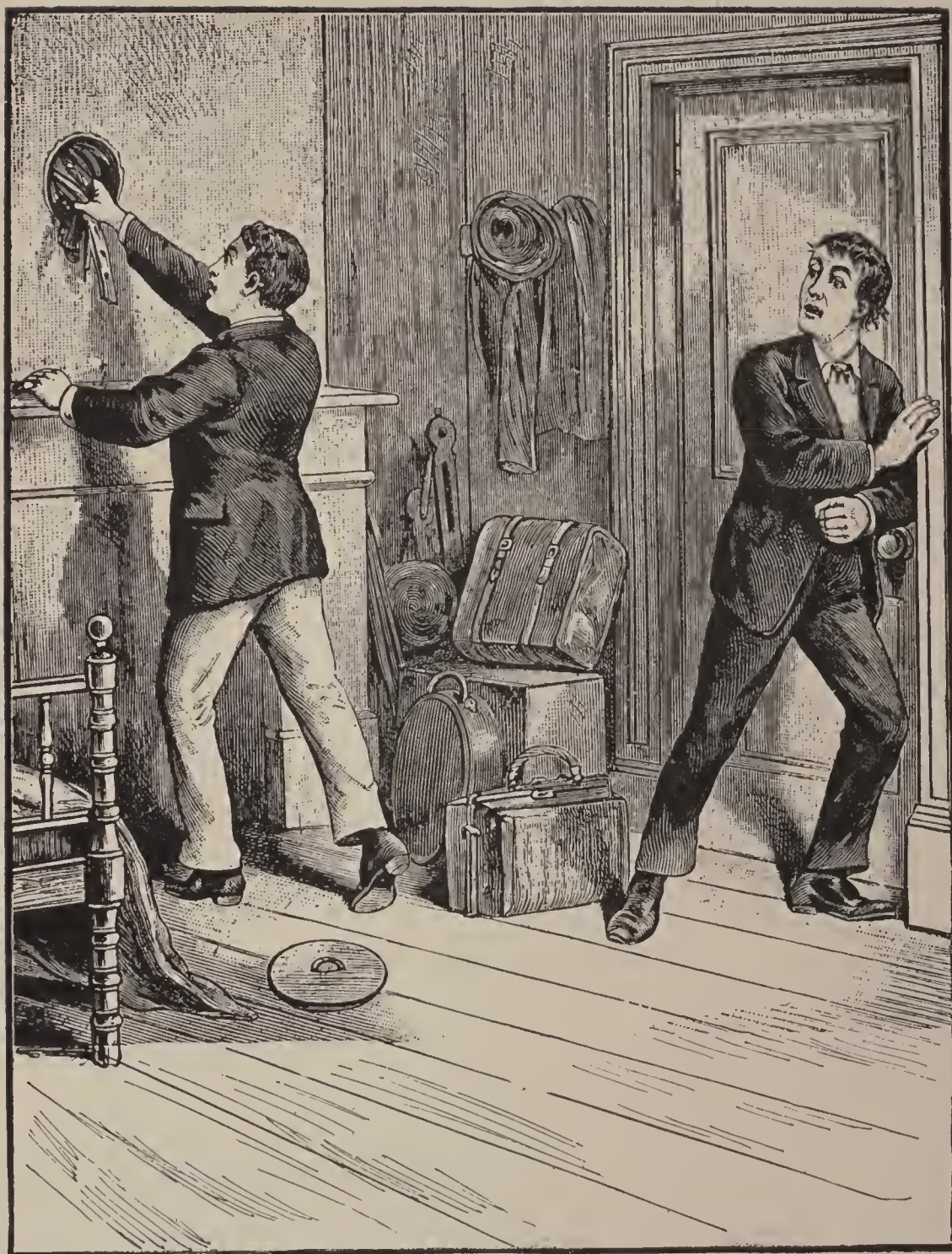
"I am sure it is not in the house," said Mr. Preston.

Then Steerly turned upon his host, with a peculiar look upon his countenance, and an intonation to his voice which Zig-Zag could not understand, and said:

"I have no doubt but you know."

The landlord suddenly turned pale, though quickly recovering his self-possession, he exclaimed:

"Explain your meaning, sir."



“The next moment Zig-Zag thrust his hand into the opening, regardless of the consequence.”

(See page 87)

“Mr. Preston,” said Steerly, looking him steadily in the face, “I hope you won’t force me to say the unpleasant truths in my mind.”

The landlord’s hands clasped and unclasped as if he would seize hold of the other, but trying to appear calm, he said :

“Explain your meaning, sir, in as few words as possible.”

“Just as you say, Mr. Preston, and upon second thought it may be best, for it will give you a chance to tell us what business you had in the room of your guest after he had left it.”

Zig-Zag, who was watching both men closely, saw the landlord look paler than ever, while he trembled from head to foot. Clutching at the back of a chair for support, he exclaimed :

“I have been in no one’s room where I did not have business.”

“Pray what was your business in Watterson Wiswell’s room, and what did you bring out?”

Turning abruptly upon his heel the landlord left them without replying.

“You can judge for yourself whether I was right or

not," said Steerly to Zig-Zag. "He is a rascal from the word 'go.'"

It is little wonder if Zig-Zag knew not what to say or think.

If Steerly was assuming a part, he was doing it most successfully.

"Come, let us stir ourselves. That body has not been moved for any honest reasons, and we must find it if it is in our power. Let's look the room over now we are alone."

Zig-Zag followed him into the apartment in silence, and though they looked the room carefully through, they found nothing to solve the mystery.

"Mr. Steerly," said Zig-Zag, suddenly, "what do you suppose has become of his trunk? It is not in his room."

"It was there when he died," replied Steerly. "That——"

The appearance of Mr. Preston caused him to stop with his sentence unfinished.

"I have found a clew!" exclaimed the landlord. "There are footprints under the window where some one has been! I do not know how far they can be followed, but I have no doubt we shall track the owner down."

Naturally enough, this announcement caused great excitement, Steerly to all appearances now becoming the most anxious of the three.

Mr. Preston had already procured a lantern, and with this in hand he led the way around the house to the window opening from the fateful room.

By this time our little party was joined by the hostler and the chore boy.

For a short distance from the house on that side the ground was soft, so the footsteps of a man were to be plainly seen in the yielding soil. But after going a few yards a sward was reached where all impression of the tracks disappeared.

“It is no use,” said Mr. Preston, at last. “We might as well wait until daylight, which is not far off. There didn’t seem to be but one man, but I don’t see how he could have carried it off alone.”

Steerly did not seem inclined to offer any suggestion, but rather went back into the house, to retire to his room.

Zig-Zag followed his example, to find Budd sleeping as soundly as ever.

The boy conjurer felt that it would be useless to attempt to sleep any more that night, and he threw himself into

the nearest chair to think and ponder over his unwelcome situation.

What should he do next?

He had never liked Steerly, which fact may have caused his distrust for him now, though he felt he had sufficient reasons for believing him intent upon dishonest purposes. His whole course of action since they had got to Glimmerton showed that he had some hidden object at stake. Was it possible Professor Wiswell had been the possessor of property, which Steerly was plotting to get?

Zig-Zag was inclined to think that it had been Steerly rather than Preston who had taken the conjurer's trunk and papers. But how could the former have got it away without being seen? It must have been done in broad daylight.

This trunk was of good size and substantially made. Steerly had one somewhat smaller. Zig-Zag carried no trunk, but found a large valise ample to hold all he had taken with him.

Trying to unravel at least one thread in the chain of mystery which had become wound about his fate in this country tavern, our hero passed the time until daylight began to stream into the window.

About this time Budd Newbegin woke up, and seeing his companion sitting in his chair, he exclaimed :

“B’gosh, what made you get up so early?”

“I have been up this two hours. Budd, do you know what sort of a man this Mr. Preston is?”

“I should snicker if I didn’t. He’s just such a man as Sam Goodhate is. There you are posted right off quick.”

“That might be if I knew Mr. Goodhate, but as I do not happen to have that pleasure, I fail to see——”

“B’gosh ! I guess that’s so. Well, Sam’s a peeler ; that is, he tries to be.”

“I am afraid your evidence would not amount to much on a witness stand, Budd. What is a peeler?”

“A peeler ? Well, b’gosh ! a peeler is a chap that ain’t one thing nor ’nother. He’s too good to be bad, and he’s too bad to be good. Reckon I’ve floored you now.”

“I think I understand you now ; and I half agree with you. Ha ! what is that?”

The last exclamation was called forth from Zig-Zag at discovering a small pile of soot on the floor directly under the chimney flue, and in its midst a piece of soiled paper.

To Zig-Zag, in his anxious state of mind, nothing was

so trifling in its appearance that it did not seem of importance enough to be noticed.

He picked up the bit of paper, and shaking the dust from it, scanned it eagerly in the uncertain light of early morning, to find only a few characters made upon one side with a pen.

“The professor’s work,” he said, and then, as he looked at the wall more closely, he saw that the “thimble” used to stop the aperture for the stovepipe—no stove was in the room—had been disturbed within a short time.

Removing the covering with a trembling hand, he peered into the dark orifice, when he saw that some object was hanging in the throat of the chimney.

At that moment some one thumped loudly upon the door.

CHAPTER IX.

DISAPPEARANCE OF STEERLY.

"Who is there?" demanded Zig-Zag.

"I, Steerly," replied the one without. "Are you going to sleep all day? Open the door so I can come in, for I want to talk with you."

"In a minute," replied the boy conjurer. "I am afraid I am more than commonly sleepy this morning."

It seemed provoking that Steerly should interrupt him at that moment, but resolving that the other should not know of his discovery, even if it was of no importance, Zig-Zag hastily replaced the cover and brushed the soot from his hands.

Then, with a warning gesture to Budd, he started toward the door.

"Are you going to keep me waiting here all day?" asked Steerly, impatiently.

"I suppose you will give me time to dress," retorted Zig-Zag, as he opened the door.

"I have too much on hand to fritter away our time in bed," declared Steerly, as he stepped into the room, cast-

ing a sharp look about the apartment, until his gaze rested on the apparatus of the conjurer.

“Ah, here it is,” he said. “I think I will take charge of this now,” advancing to the corner where the boxes and bundles had been hastily deposited.

“Stop!” exclaimed the boy conjurer, “you must not touch it. You will disarrange everything so it will take me all day to straighten matters out. You know Professor Wiswell was always very particular about that,” he added, seeing the look of amazement upon the other’s countenance.

“So that is your reason, is it?” sneered Steerly. “How long is it since pollywogs have begun to swim?”

“Sir! if you have nothing better to say you might have remained out of the room. As long as I act my part in this company, that apparatus remains in my care.”

“Oh, excuse me; of course it shall be as you say. But I thought it would be safer in my room. You know we have got to be out looking for that body, and I didn’t know but this fellow with you might be disturbing things.”

“I will answer for him. You can go downstairs if you wish; I will join you in a few minutes.”

“Which is as much as to say, I suppose, that you do not wish my company here.”

“If you choose to put that meaning to my words you can, Mr. Steerly.”

“You may live to regret those words, Mr. Wiswell. But as I did not come here to pick a quarrel with you, I will leave you with your precious chum who seems more to your liking than myself.”

Though Zig-Zag doubted his wisdom in answering Steerly as he had done, he was delighted to see him leave the apartment, and to hear his heavy step descending the stairs.

Zig-Zag quickly closed and locked the door, saying at the same time to Budd:

“Please stand here, and the moment you hear any one coming, let me know. I am going to see what that is in the chimney.”

Springing from the couch, Budd quickly put on his clothes in readiness to carry out the request of his companion, while Zig-Zag again removed the thimble to peer into the flue.

The next moment he thrust his hand into the opening,

regardless of the consequence, to pull out a tangled mass of hoop iron, leather and wood.

As he held the blackened *débris* up before his gaze, a low cry of surprise left his lips.

"It is a part of Mr. Wiswell's trunk!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "And the rest must be in the chimney!"

Feeling considerable excitement, Zig-Zag again thrust his arm into the opening, though he failed to find anything further to reward him for his trouble.

"The rest has fallen to the bottom of the chimney," he said. "Whoever did this must have broken the trunk into pieces and dropped them in here, the handiest hiding place. As it is a box chimney, no doubt the ruins have fallen to the bottom, where they cannot be reached. Can it be Mr. Wiswell's papers were put in here with the pieces of trunk?"

Of course Budd was not expected to answer this question.

Zig-Zag, however, was now quite sure that Steerly had removed the trunk in this way, for it did not seem reasonable that Mr. Preston would have taken this manner to conceal the evidence of his work.

"I hear some one coming!" whispered Budd.

"How provoking! What shall I do with this piece of trunk? I will put it under the bed."

Suiting the action to the word, Zig-Zag had barely carried out his plan and thrown a rug over the floor where the soot had fallen, when the voice of Mr. Preston was heard, saying:

"I guess you had better come downstairs as soon as you can, Mr. Wiswell, for I do not like the way that Steerly is prowling about. He has gone over to the hall now."

"I will be down in a minute, Mr. Preston."

"Excuse me for troubling you; that will be all right."

"Budd, I have a favor to ask of you," said Zig-Zag, as he hastily concealed the evidence of his discovery. "You understand something of my situation here, and while I am gone I don't want you to leave this room under any circumstances, and if Mr. Steerly comes back do not let him come in."

"Not if he hews the door down!" replied the other.

"I think I can trust you."

With these words Zig-Zag went below to meet the landlord, who was anxiously awaiting him.

"Steerly has gone over to the hall, though I do not

think he can get in yet. Why, of course the janitor has not got around yet. I am afraid you have had a poor night's rest."

"I don't suppose you have learned anything concerning the disappearance of the body?"

"Not a thing. One of the selectmen lives at the village here, and I am going to speak to him as soon as I see any signs of his being up."

"Mr. Preston, if anything should be dropped in the chimney from one of the flues, where would it be likely to stop?"

"What! you don't think the body has fallen down the chimney? Why, that could not be."

"Excuse me, I did not mean that. But supposing I had dropped a small object into the pipe hole from the room I occupied last night, would it be likely to stop before it got to the bottom of the chimney?"

"I see," said the landlord, with a breath of relief. "No; it would fall into the cellar. Say, I had a flue made in the chimney down cellar last winter, so I could have a fire there to keep my potatoes from freezing, and if you would like you can go down and see if you can get your property."

This was an opportunity Zig-Zag had not looked for, and he quickly accepted the offer.

He found nothing, however, to reward him for his trouble, and he gave up, more in the dark than ever.

By that time Steerly had returned to the house, appearing very impatient to begin the search.

He appeared very sociable to Zig-Zag, even asking his pardon for the hasty words he had uttered.

The selectman mentioned was seen, and he at once entered into the undertaking of the search, with a confidence the others did not have.

Not finding any trace about the buildings, the men—and by that time several more had joined the party—separated and began to scour the adjacent country.

Fearing for the safety of the apparatus at the hall, Zig-Zag had carried it to the hotel with the rest, to leave Budd still in charge of it.

“Remember what I told you before, Budd. I shan’t be gone very long, and I will pay you for your time if you are faithful to your duty.”

“You ought to know by this time that I am a business man. No Cowly is coming in here, unless he walks over my dead body!”

"I hope it won't come to that, but keep a sharp lookout, and I will do the same."

Zig-Zag was called from the hotel, farther away than he had expected, and from necessity he lost sight of Steerly two or three times.

Finally it was decided that the search was useless, for beyond the footprints leading from the window, not a sign could be found of the missing object, or of those who had taken it.

Zig-Zag was joined by Mr. Preston, the selectman and two townsmen, each one of whom was positive it was useless to continue the search, so it was decided to return to the hotel.

"Where is Mr. Steerly?" asked Zig-Zag, who saw that the other was not to be seen.

"He went farther to the south," replied Mr. Preston. "We shall find him at the house without doubt. Come, let's go home."

It was about ten o'clock in the forenoon when the little party got back to the hotel, and Zig-Zag was looking anxiously for Steerly, when Mrs. Preston came rushing out of the house, crying:

"I am so glad you have come! That Mr. Steerly has

been here, Mr. Wiswell, and gone off with a team. I hope he hasn't taken anything belonging to you."

With dread forebodings of what had taken place, Zig-Zag ran up the stairs, to find the door of his room wide open and Budd Newbegin nowhere to be seen.

Looking excitedly into the apartment, he saw to his dismay that the apparatus was gone!

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING REAPPEARANCE.

"Where is Budd Newbegin?" was Zig-Zag's first question.

"The youngster who was with you? I had forgotten him; but come to think of it, I have not seen him since Mr. Steerly went away."

"How did Mr. Steerly go, and which way?"

"The first I knew," said Mrs. Preston, who was answering Zig-Zag's questions, "he drove up to the door with one of the neighbor's horse and wagon. He said he had bought the team, and began at once to load the trunks and things into the wagon, Dalton helping him. He said he was going to Norton Narrows, but I noticed he did not start that way."

"Did Budd Newbegin go with him?"

"He did not that I know of. In fact I am sure he was not with him."

"Then, what can have become of him?"

"Perhaps he is about the buildings, though I have not seen him."



“ Budd pulled in the horse with an abruptness which not only threw the animal upon its haunches, but sent him headlong to the ground.”
(See page 101)

"Did not Mr. Steerly mention my name?"

"Yes; he said you were to come after him, and that he was going ahead to get ready for the show to-night."

Nothing further of importance was learned to throw any light on the mystery of Steerly's conduct, or the disappearance of Budd.

It was found that Steerly had actually bought the team he had gone away with, and paid in full for it.

Zig-Zag was at a loss more than ever to know what to do, but in the midst of his dilemma Mr. Benton, the selectman, who seemed like an honest person, called him aside.

"You appear like a trustworthy boy, Master Wiswell," said the selectman, as soon as they were alone, "and I want to ask you a few questions for your good.

"Do you think this man Steerly has been conniving with Preston here to carry out his plans?"

"I can tell no more than you can," replied Zig-Zag. "I have been thinking that Mr. Preston has acted very peculiarly in this matter."

"That would be nothing strange, for I have no better opinion of him. I don't like the looks of this affair, but I

can't see as we can prove anything against Preston if we were to have him arrested."

"Now then, the best thing for you to do is to do nothing. I will make out a warrant, as I happen to be the nearest to a lawyer of any one found in this back town, and let you swear to it, and then we will see if Sheriff Flanders cannot find the rascal. He will be the first man to elude him. So keep quiet for an hour or so."

This was about as hard a thing as he could have asked of our hero, but he managed to content himself after a fashion, while every one around him discussed what was a "nine days' wonder" to these quiet townspeople.

It seemed most singular that Budd Newbegin should have disappeared so suddenly and completely.

During this interval of waiting, Zig-Zag resolved to make a full explanation of his situation to Mr. Benton, and thus appeal to his assistance in his hour of need.

Subsequent events proved that this was the wisest course he could have followed.

When he had finished, the other said:

"I am glad you were level-headed enough to come to me in regard to this matter, and I promise to see you through in first-class shape. As soon as I have dis-

patched this warrant to Flanders, I will make out a petition to the court to have you appointed administrator of Professor Wiswell's estate. No; I cannot do that, for you are a minor. Well, in that case, perhaps I had better take it myself. It shall not interfere in any way with your business, for I will select you as my agent. Between us we will see what we can do toward foiling Mr. Steerly. To be honest, it is my belief there is money somewhere left by your foster-parent, and this Steerly is trying to get possession of it."

Zig-Zag had never felt so grateful to any one in his life, if I except his regard for Professor Wiswell, and he returned to the hotel in better spirits than he had known since the previous day.

In the face of his other troubles he could not forget, however, that he was booked to give an exhibition that evening at Norton Narrows, and he wondered how he should meet the disappointed people.

It was already past noon, and about two o'clock Zig-Zag hired a team of Mr. Preston to take him over to Norton, the landlord's boy going with him to come back with the horse in case he should decide to stop overnight.

Nothing had been heard from the sheriff, and no trace

of the missing body, though Mr. Benton promised that the search should not be given up while there was a hope of ultimate success.

“I will keep my eyes and ears open, Zig-Zag, and keep you posted,” said Mr. Benton. “I warn you to look out for yourself. Come back here when you can conveniently, and post me if there is anything new.”

Not knowing what might happen, Zig-Zag took his valise with him, and also the box, which was all he had of Professor Wiswell’s possessions.

Then, bidding adieu to the few acquaintances he had made at Glimmerton, he started for Norton Narrows.

The day was pleasant, considering the lateness of the season, and Zig-Zag would have enjoyed his ride to Norton had his mind been filled with less harrowing thoughts.

As it was he scarcely noticed the rugged scenery which stretched continually upon either hand. He was wondering what he should do when he got to his destination, and more than this, what was to be done after that. If the apparatus should be recovered, he could continue on the conjuring tour, but somehow he had little faith to think they would find Steerly, whom he knew to be a crafty man.

While he was thus buried in deep meditation, very much to the chagrin of his companion, who was inclined to be talkative, more than two-thirds of the distance to the Narrows was passed, when all at once the driver exclaimed:

“I hear some one driving like the old Harry! We are followed.”

Zig-Zag had already heard the sound of a vehicle being borne over the rocky road at a furious pace, and looked up, at first unable to locate the direction whence the outbreak came.

“It is not behind us,” he said. “Isn’t there another road coming down from our left—look there!”

They had reached the summit of a considerable hill, and gazing out in the direction indicated by Zig-Zag, a team could be seen on another swell of land.

The horse was evidently rushing on at the top of its speed, and it quickly disappeared into the valley lying between the two eminences.

“Doesn’t this road meet that below here?” asked Zig-Zag, as he took a hasty survey of the country.

“Yes.”

"Whip up, then. If it is a runaway, some one may need our help."

Eager for the excitement, the boy whipped up the horse, which was a spirited animal, so they were soon dashing down the descent at a wild rate of speed.

Going at that furious pace they soon came in sight of the forks of the roads, and just in the nick of time to see the runaway team reach the place.

The horse was being driven by a wild-appearing driver, who was standing bolt upright in the wagon and flourishing a whip in the air, as he shouted:

"Yir-rup, old stockings! Right this way for the campgrounds. Yir-rup!"

Even before the shrill voice had reached his ears, Zig-Zag had recognized the erratic driver as Budd Newbegin!

He was bareheaded, and his long yellow hair was flying about his head, while one of his coat sleeves, ripped from wristband to shoulder, flopped in the breeze, as he swung his long, flail-like arm in the air.

"Hello, Budd!" sung out Zig-Zag, "hold up a moment."

Turning suddenly to catch a sight of our hero, the

crazy Budd pulled in the horse with an abruptness which not only threw the animal upon its haunches, but sent him headlong to the ground, followed by several articles of the conjurer's art.

Fortunately, Zig-Zag and his companion gained the spot before the struggling horse did any damage, and, quieting the creature with a few soothing words, the boy conjurer helped Budd to his feet.

"In mercy's name, Budd, where have you been? What has happened?"

"Sol Ginger! who'd a-thought it? Whoop! I've got 'em all there in the waggin—every shaving of 'em. I'm a business man."

"Explain yourself, Budd. I don't understand what all this means. Where have you been?"

"Ain't I 'splaining? Just wait till I get this dirt out of my mouth, and I'll tell you how I skinned the old duffer's eyes and took the ribbons into my own hands. The duds are all there, and I tell you I'm a business man."

CHAPTER XI.

“EGGS — EGGSACTLY !”

Budd Newbegin was too much excited to make any lucid explanation of his adventures, so Zig-Zag waited with what patience he could for the other to recover his wonted composure.

He saw, to his unbounded delight, that the apparatus was apparently all safe, and in the wagon he could see Steerly's trunk.

“Well, Budd,” said Zig-Zag, at last, “I am impatient to hear what you have done. I thought you had gone back on me.”

“Gone back on you! I guess you don't know me yet. When Budd Newbegin goes back on a pard you can set it down that the sun is on a strike and the universe has concluded to get along without him. I tell you, Zig, it's s'prisin' what one feller can do all alone. I tell you I have done some big adventures since you left me.”

“I don't doubt it; but tell me how Steerly came to get off with the apparatus——”

“He didn't get off with it. Ain't it here? But if it

hadn't been for me you would never have seen it again. I tell you no Cowly can get ahead of me.”

All this was exasperating to the impatient Zig-Zag, but all he could do was to let the other tell his story as he would.

It seemed that Budd, while at his post of duty, fell asleep and slept so soundly that Steerly removed the entire lot of apparatus without awakening him! He did not come to a realization of what was being done until Steerly had got his load in readiness for starting.

Smarting from the realization that he had not done his duty, Budd ran down the stairs and out into the shed where the team was standing.

“B'gosh! I didn't know what to do,” he continued. “Cowly weren't right there, but I see him coming. I had climbed onto the waggin, and seeing one of the boxes was nearly empty, I dropped into it, thinking to hide from him till he should leave the place for a minute again, when I was going to unload the whole lot of stuff.

“Well, I heard Cowly, or Steerly, as you call him, climb up onto the waggin, and then I knowed from the jolting the horse was starting. You see, I had got myself into

a purty pickle, I darsn't holler, so I kept still, to be carted off like a great big carrot in a punkin shell.

“There were some big clothes in the box, and I pulled 'em up over and around me, so I felt tolerable comfortable, and mebbe I went to sleep again. If I did, I woke up when it was time for me, and the waggin didn't seem to be moving.

“I poked up my head keerful like, and at furst I didn't see nothing of Cowly. Then I see the horse was hitched to a tree by the roadside, where there wasn't a house to be seen. Happening to look over into the pasture on my right, my hat rose right up on my head when I see that blamed Cowly a trudging off with a box on his shoulder, and a something which looked like a shovel in one hand.

“I just let him tramp, and kept still, until he'd got out of sight, when I got out of that box in a jiffy, unhitched that horse, and driv away without saying Tom Robinson to anybody.

“I driv keerful for a while, and then faster and faster, until I was just humming it when you see me. What you been doing?”

“So you haven’t seen anything of Steerly since you left him?”

“Of course not. I ain’t been letting no grass grow under my heels. I tell you I’m a hummer. Say, we are going to give that show to the Narrows to-night, ain’t we? The ’couterments are all here.”

“You must give me time to think, Budd; this is so unexpected I am not prepared to decide on anything rationally. Of course Steerly will follow you as soon as he finds his team is gone.”

“Well, what if he does? I guess we three can shake the nation out of him. But let’s hustle for the Narrows.”

“Perhaps we had better, for I have no time to spare to get ready for the entertainment. We might as well take Mr. Steerly’s team along with us. If he follows he can get it, but if he does not, I will send word back to Glimmerton by Joe here that it is at the Narrows.”

Having come to this conclusion, the journey to Norton Narrows was resumed, Zig-Zag taking his valise and getting into the wagon driven by Budd, then allowing Joe to return to Glimmerton with Mr. Preston’s team.

Zig-Zag found Norton Narrows a larger village than he had expected, and, unlike Glimmerton, it seemed like a

thriving place. There were two small shops and some other industries, so he anticipated he would have a fair-sized audience.

The hall had been already engaged, and the janitor was anxiously awaiting his appearance.

So, losing as little time as possible in the preliminary arrangements, Zig-Zag, assisted by Budd, began to carry the apparatus into the hall, which, like that at Glimmer-ton, was on the second floor.

Of course a curtain had to be put up at the rear end, but a permanent platform had been built across the entire width of the hall, so they were saved this task.

By the time their work was done it was dark, and the twain were glad to repair to their stopping place for a brief rest.

As this was Budd's first attempt to assist, it was necessary Zig-Zag should "coach" him, as it is called, and the young wizard was naturally afraid the other would fail in his part, for very much of the success of the conjurer often depends on his assistant.

Accordingly in the hurry of the preparations, the boy conjurer for the time forgot everything else. He had

seen that Steerly's horse had been given proper care, but the other's trunk he had not given a second thought.

He had selected the janitor, who was recommended to him as a trustworthy person, to sell the tickets and to find another to take them at the door.

The time seemed to fly, and almost before he knew it the hour for the entertainment had come and the spectators had begun to gather.

“Don't forget all I have told you, Budd,” admonished Zig-Zag, as his companion began to grow excited and nervous.

Promptly at the promised moment Zig-Zag signed to Budd to run up the curtain, when the boy conjurer, looking as smiling and confident as if he had never known trouble, stood before the audience, and as he raised the magic wand he was greeted by cheers from the spectators.

Then the hall became silent as his silvery, bewitching voice fell upon the scene.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we will open our evening's entertainment with an intermission of ten minutes.”

While the on-lookers gazed upon him in amazement at this unexpected statement, he continued:

“During this intermission I will partake of a little lunch, if you do not object. Before I can have this lunch, I have got to cook it, and before I can cook it I have got to procure it. Ha! I have it! No, I mean I have it to get.”

“Eggsactly!” called out a gruff voice from the rear of the hall.

At the sound of this voice every one turned to see who had spoken, to see a member from the rural district looking exceedingly sheepish, though he had not opened his lips, it having been the “second voice” of our ventriloquist, the boy conjurer.

“Never mind him who has just spoken,” said Zig-Zag, urbanely. “I have got used to such interruptions. By the way, I must thank the gentlemen for suggesting what my lunch shall be. I move we shall have eggs. I am very fond of eggs; and I will show you that I can eat more eggs than any man in the house.”

“Eggscept me!” piped a shrill voice from the right-hand side of the hall, followed by applause from the crowd.

“We will see about that,” said the boy conjurer. “If my friend can eat more eggs than I can, I will wager

my finger nail he hasn't got such a hen to lay them as I have. Biddy, Biddy, Biddy!”

Then, to the amazement of the spectators Budd Newbegin, with his shuffling, shambling gait, appeared upon the stage.

“This Shanghai, as you will all observe,” said Zig-Zag, “isn't a very promising-looking pullet, but I will soon show you that she can lay more eggs than any two-legged hen in Norton. Now for the proof.”

“Eggspeditiously!” said a voice from the distance.

“I wish the gentlemen would not interrupt me.”

“Eggscuse me!” called another from a different part of the hall, “but I eggspect to eggsplain eggstraordinary eggshibition eggs——”

“I cannot explain my lunch unless the gentlemen will refrain from speaking. However, if there is any gentleman here who wishes to make a speech, I will allow him ten minutes of my time.”

A deathlike stillness followed, and the boy conjurer continued:

“My friend,” speaking to Budd, “please face the crowd and look pleasant. Hold this plate with both your hands, and don't drop it, upon the peril of your life. You know

I want some eggs for my supper, and that my sole dependence is in you. Now, then, look me straight in the face and imagine yourself a huge Shanghai pullet,” and as he spoke Zig-Zag began to wave his wand back and forth in front of his victim, who soon began to roll his eyes and appear as if he was choking.

Then he gave a gulp, and his lips beginning to protrude, the shell of an egg showed itself in his mouth.

“Eureka!” cried Zig-Zag, “my supper is assured. You all see I made no idle boast,” holding the hen fruit up so all could see it, and then placing it on the plate, to call for another.

Again Budd went through his contortions, until a white circle was visible between his lips, and a second egg was removed by the conjurer. This was repeated until an even dozen lay upon the plate.

“A pretty fair laying for a little pullet,” said Zig-Zag, viewing the plate of eggs with evident satisfaction. “You can return to your nest now, my little dear, while I make my repast.

“As I am so very fond of eggs, and the intermission is almost over, I will not stop to cook these, but swallow them as they are, not even stopping to peel them. Here

goes for the first one,” and to the amazement of the on-lookers he tossed into his mouth and to all appearances swallowed an egg at one gulp. Then, a second, a third, and a fourth followed.

“I am certain these are fresh-laid eggs,” he observed, as the tenth, eleventh, and finally the last one disappeared into his mouth.

As Zig-Zag craned up his neck in the effort of swallowing the twelfth egg, he happened to glance toward the door at the farther end of the hall, when he for a moment lost his self-possession at seeing in the doorway the well-known figure of John Steerly!

CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISE FOR ALL.

If for a moment thrown off his guard by the unexpected appearance of Steerly, who seemed to haunt him like an evil shadow, Zig-Zag quickly regained his self-control, to succeed his look of trepidation with a horrible grimace, which brought an outburst of laughter from the spectators.

Steerly at that moment disappeared into the hallway, and the boy conjurer was certain he heard him descending the stairs.

“Oh, dear!” groaned the young conjurer, “I am afraid I was too greedy. I am sure the pullet that laid that last egg had never been properly vaccinated. I shall have to give up my lunch, when I supposed I had got it sure enough. Possession, they say, is nine points in a lawsuit, but it is just so many points against me. Here they come,” and then, to the blank amazement of the gaping lookers-on, he took from his mouth, one after another, the whole dozen of eggs!

As he laid the last one upon the plate, he called to Budd, saying:

“Take them away; the sight of them makes me sick. Why hadn’t you told me you had been living on tainted tongue and sour cheese?”

“B’gosh! I ain’t eat no heaves, nor I ain’t got the black heel, either,” replied Budd, to the amusement of the crowd, as he took the plate of eggs.

“Hold on!” exclaimed Zig-Zag, as if suddenly possessed with a new idea, “I want to see what sort of eggs those are. There is something wrong about them, I am sure.”

With these words the young conjurer selected, apparently at random, one of the eggs, and, striking it on the edge of the plate in plain sight of the audience, broke the shell.

“Ho-ho!” he exclaimed, “I don’t wonder my stomach revolted against such diet. Why, look here!” and Zig-Zag began to pull out—a barber’s pole!

Up, up rose the familiar object, until the wondering people saw produced before their eyes this sign of the tonsorial artist, which stood at least a foot and a half in height.

"I wonder if the little shaver is in here himself," said the boy conjurer, looking into the shell. "I shouldn't be surprised. See here," when he began to pull out white ribbon, and he kept pulling and pulling, until he had a strip more than a dozen yards in length.

"That isn't all," said Zig-Zag, again peering into the shell. "I can see more finery, which looks like the yolk. No; this is ribbon, too, but yellow."

The length of ribbon this time more than equaled the other, and how such an incredible amount of things could be contained in the shell of an ordinary egg was beyond the comprehension of the most astute.

Of course this had been a "prepared" egg, and the whole secret of the trick lies in the neatness and compactness with which the paper imitating a ribbon had been wound and packed in. The barber's pole was also a roll of strong cartridge paper in two colors, so arranged that as it is drawn out it shall assume a spiral form, deceiving the very eyes of the closest observer.

Acting as if it was quite heavy, Zig-Zag had dropped it into the receptacle behind the table, to await use at another time.

"I am not going to destroy any more of those wonder-

ful eggs, for I believe there is a fortune in them. Here, my friend, take them away, and don't you break any of them."

His audience in good humor by this time, Zig-Zag went on with his pleasing exhibition of legerdemain, until the house went into raptures over his performances. Wonderful feat after feat was gone through, to the unbounded delight of all, and most especially Budd Newbegin, who did his part with surprising fidelity.

Well satisfied with his own success, the boy conjurer at last closed the entertainment with a happy exhibition of his powers as a ventriloquist, when, amid the ringing applause, the curtain went down.

The moment the strain of the trying affair was over, Zig-Zag's mind reverted to Steerly, and he wondered what the other's presence boded him there. No good, it was certain.

"Please look after the apparatus, Budd, while I see the janitor. I will be back in a moment."

"I will, and I won't go to sleep, neither. Say, Zig, ain't we some punkins to-night. How 'em folks roared every time I came on the roosterum!"

"Yes, but keep your eyes open for a minute."

The people were fast leaving the hall, and, seeing the janitor, who had sold the tickets, at the farther side, Zig-Zag hurried that way, to be met by him halfway.

“Allow me to congratulate you, Professor Wiswell, upon your success. I will confess that when I first saw how young you were I feared the folks would be disappointed, but you have more than kept your promise. Here are the door fees, and a snug sum, too. Yes, take it now. I never want other people’s money in my pockets longer than I can help.”

“I might as well settle with you for the hall,” said Zig-Zag, as he accepted the money. “Let’s see, you were to charge me——”

“There he is—arrest him!” broke in the voice of John Steerly, and he pushed himself excitedly through the crowd, half dragging by the arm another man.

A smile of triumph showed itself on Steerly’s dark face, as he reached the side of Zig-Zag, while his companion, turning to the janitor, said :

“Mr. Hill, I shall have to put an injunction on you against paying over to this self-styled Professor Wiswell any money.”

"I have no money belonging to Professor Wiswell, Sheriff Locke," replied the janitor.

"He has!" interposed Steerly. "He has all of the money taken at the door. It must amount to seventy-five dollars."

"I have just paid to Mr. Wiswell all the money that has been taken to-night," declared Mr. Hill. "As it is in his possession, you can do nothing with me."

The expression upon Steerly's face was a sight to see.

"Hand over that money!" he hissed, turning to Zig-Zag.

"I refuse to do so, Mr. Steerly, and it is where you cannot touch it."

"I know what I can touch," roared Steerly. "I have got out an attachment here on that apparatus of mine. You can hand over that money, or I will command the officer to do his duty. Which shall it be?"

Zig-Zag was amazed by this audacious action on the part of his enemy. How he had come there he had not time to conjecture, but he only realized that this proceeding might mean serious trouble to him. He had an idea that the officer could not touch the money in his

pocket, and determined to stand boldly up for his own rights, he said:

"The money is mine, honestly earned, and I shall not give it up till I am obliged to do so."

"We will see about that later," hissed Steerly. "Sheriff Locke, I command you to do your duty. Serve your attachment on everything you can find belonging to this concern. It is this way; follow me."

The officer willingly started after Steerly, who led the way to the stage, Zig-Zag following them with a heavy heart.

"There it is!" cried Steerly, triumphantly, pulling aside the curtain and pointing to the inclosure behind the scenes.

In his excitement Steerly had not stopped to look around, taking it for granted the object of their search was at hand. But the sheriff paused, and with a swift glance over the place, said:

"Where is the property? There is nothing here, but that tow-headed scarecrow."

By this time Zig-Zag had noticed that no sign of the apparatus was to be seen. What Budd had done with it was beyond his conception, but he drew a breath of relief to find that it was out of sight.

"It must have been here a minute ago!" exclaimed the amazed Steerly. "That yellow head has hidden it. Show us where it is, or I will have you arrested."

"'Rest away, you old duffer!" replied Budd, folding his arms and facing him defiantly. "I reckon I ain't done nothing agin' the government. If you want the 'couterments just find 'em."

Sheriff Locke then began a thorough search for the missing apparatus, to be obliged to give it up.

Steerly was frantic, vowing that he would move the building, but he would have the apparatus; but his threats amounted to little, and he felt obliged to give up his quest.

In the midst of this excitement, which was running high, a newcomer entered the hall, and catching sight of Zig-Zag, hurried to his side, saying:

"Excuse me, Mr. Wiswell, but I think this box must belong to you, and I thought it best to bring it to you at once. I imagine it contains valuable papers, but I found it in the hotel shed. I recognized it by the name on the cover."

The speaker might have rattled on with his talk very much longer, for all the interruption he would have received from the others.

Zig-Zag was dumfounded at thus suddenly beholding the private strong box belonging to Professor Wiswell, and which he expected held the conjurer's secret papers.

Before he had recovered from his surprise, Steerly sprang foward to seize the box, crying:

"It belongs to me, and was stolen from my trunk!"

"Don't let him have it!" cried Budd, springing forward.

"It isn't his, for it says 'Watterson Wiswell' right on the cover."

CHAPTER XIII.

ARREST OF STEERLY.

The unexpected appearance of Professor Wiswell's little treasure chest in that place and under those peculiar circumstances, was such a surprise to Zig-Zag that his usual presence of mind completely deserted him.

Steerly's rage was too great for him to act with any decision of purpose, while Sheriff Locke looked on without knowing what to do.

Budd perhaps had the best conception of the situation, though he had no more purpose in his action than he had generally.

"I'll take care of that box," he said to him who had brought it there. "I know all about it."

"None but the owner can have it," replied the man, whom we recognize as the hostler at the Narrows hotel.

"No—no!" cried Steerly; "don't let him have it. It is mine, and it was in my trunk. Whoever got it out stole it."

"I did!" retorted Budd. "The trunk fell and bu'sted

open, when the box tumbled out on the ground, and I picked it up."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Steerly. "Sheriff Locke, arrest these fellows as thieves. I have had my team stolen from me, and I charge that low-lived scamp with doing it."

"I have no warrant to do that," said the officer. "Before we go any further, I want an explanation of this mixed-up affair."

"Tom," he said, turning to the hostler, "be kind enough to tell me what you know about the matter."

"I only know, Mr. Locke, that these young gentlemen put up a team at our stable this afternoon, which they said belonged to one John Steerly, and then came over to the hall to prepare for a show they were to give here this evening. A few minutes ago I found this box standing on the sill in the shed, and seeing it had the young conjurer's name on it, I brought it over to him at once, for I thought it was valuable."

"How came it there?" demanded Steerly. "It was in my trunk."

"I do not know that, sir. I am simply telling what I know."

"I know!" cried the irrepressible Budd Newbegin.

“Then you are the thief!” cried Steerly. “Arrest him, sheriff, or I will make a complaint against you for not doing your duty.”

At this moment newcomers were seen to enter the hall. Foremost among whom Zig-Zag recognized Mr. Flanders, the sheriff of Glimmerton.

Straight toward the little party marched the sheriff and his companion, and nodding to Sheriff Locke, he fixed his coal-black eyes upon Steerly, saying :

“John Steerly, I believe.”

“Yes, sir,” faltered the trembling wretch, anticipating that he was in trouble.

“You are my prisoner, Mr. Steerly,” and before the amazed man could object, the handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists.

The officer had spoken low, but every person in the hall heard the ominous words, and the sharp click of the handcuffs reached every ear.

As soon as Steerly had recovered from his amazement, he uttered a torrent of language we do not care to repeat here.

“It is an outrage!” he shouted, “and somebody will pay dearly for this. Grin, you contemptible thief!” he added,

looking toward Zig-Zag, "your day of reckoning will soon come. You will soon be in my place."

Sheriff Flanders did not allow much of this talk, but he quickly marched his prisoner out of the hall.

"You will be wanted over to Glimmerton to-morrow, at ten o'clock, as a witness, Mr. Wiswell," said the officer. "That young man with you must come, too."

"Yes, sir," replied our hero. "We will be there early in the morning."

"Very well."

"That beats me," said Sheriff Locke, as he looked after the departing party, with a look of chagrin. "I didn't like the appearance of that fellow from the first. Well, I suppose I can go home now. Good-evening, Professor Wiswell; I trust you will harbor up no ill will against me."

"None whatever, sir; good-evening."

"Here is your box, professor," said the hostler.

Zig-Zag accepted the miniature chest with sincere thanks to the faithful Tom Wright.

"I now propose we all go over to the hotel," said the latter.

"Before we go," said Zig-Zag, "I am curious to know what has become of my apparatus."

“Oh, yes ; I had forgotten that. Do you wish to take it over to the hotel?”

“I think it will be necessary to find it first ; and as Mr. Locke gave that up as a bad job, it may bother us, unless my friend, Budd Newbegin, will enlighten me in regard to its whereabouts.”

“Didn’t I fool the old duffer,” said Budd, with a broad grin on his face. “Say, Zig, I guess you begin to know me now.”

“Well, if you have concealed the things, please show us where they are now. I do not think the sheriff will trouble us again to-night.”

“Follow me,” said Budd, showing by his manner that he felt himself of a little more account just then than any one else there, as he led the way behind the curtain.

“The minute I see that Cowly, or Steerly, wotever he is, I knowed he was after ’em ’couterments, and I said to myself that he wouldn’t catch me napping this time. I had seen there was a trapdoor leading down into the room below this, and while you and he were perlavering, I chucked ’em all down there.”

By this time, Budd had opened the door designated by him, and peering into the opening, Zig-Zag was pleased to

see the apparatus safe and sound, where his faithful assistant had put the entire parts.

“You did well, Budd, and you have my thanks for it. I did not dream of there being a door here ; it fits so closely I think everything will be safe there to-night. Isn’t that so, Mr. Hill?”

“I will be responsible for them, professor. I shall lock up the hall as soon as you go out.”

“All right ; we will leave everything there until morning. Come, Budd, we will go over to the hotel.”

“Say, Zig,” said the latter, as they walked along side by side. “I guess you begin to think you can’t get along without me.”

“Of course I couldn’t, Budd ; so set your mind at rest on that score.”

Though aware the disturbance in the hall and arrest of Steerly had caused considerable talk and made him an object of remark, Zig-Zag paid little heed to what was being said, seeking his room as soon as possible, Budd accompanying him.

“Now we will open the box,” said Budd, whose gaze had not left the object since it had been placed in his companion’s hands.

“No, Budd; we won’t open it to-night. I shall take it over to Glimmerton to-morrow and have it opened there by the proper authority.”

“Sol Ginger! I guess we are big enough to bu’st open that little lock. I want to see what is in it.”

“So do I, Budd, and for better reasons than you, but I do not think I had better open it.

“By the way, Budd, didn’t you break into Steerly’s trunk to get this box? I don’t ask this to injure you, and I want you to tell me just as it is.”

“That would be stealing, wouldn’t it?”

“I am afraid it would come under that name, though we might consider it a justifiable case.”

“Well, b’gosh! you needn’t justify it, for I didn’t break into Cowly’s trunk. I had heard you say you wished you knew what there was in it that belonged to the old professor, and so I thought I’d keep my eye peeled for the chance. It came s’prising quick. I went to get the trunk out of the wagon, and it slipped and fell to the ground ker-chunk, when it bu’sted open! All I did was to take the box and hide it in the woodshed. How do you s’pose that hostler found it?”

Zig-Zag saw that it was a case, concerning which the

least said would be best, so he changed the subject, to inquire about that other box, which Budd had spoken of as being carried across the pasture by Steerly, when Budd drove off with his team.

Getting nothing satisfactory in regard to the matter, Zig-Zag wisely concluded to let the whole matter rest until the next day, when no doubt the trial of Steerly would set affairs right.

He had yet to learn the deep shrewdness, as well as villainy, of the man against whom he was pitted.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUDD'S WILD RACE FOR LIFE.

Zig-Zag and Budd were astir early the next morning, and at sunrise they were ready to start for Glimmerton, having a team of the landlord of the Narrows House.

All of the paraphernalia of the show had been intrusted to the care of Mr. Hill, but the little box of treasure-papers, recovered from Steerly, the boy conjurer kept with him to place in the possession of Mr. Benton.

The ten miles' ride to Glimmerton was uneventful, and when they reached the town, they found the selectman anxiously awaiting them.

"I am glad to see you so promptly on hand," said Mr. Benton. "You see I was about right when I said Sheriff Flanders never let his man get away from him. Jack is a regular sleuthhound, when he gets on the track of his prey."

"When does the trial come off?"

"At ten o'clock, before Squire Swayne. We have concluded to hold it in Sinclair Hall. Ha! what have you there?"

"Something, if I am not mistaken, of great value to us. It is the box of papers I told you belonged to Professor Wiswell."

"The dickens you say! Where did you run across that?"

Then, in as few words as possible, Zig-Zag told what had happened at the Narrows, not omitting to tell of Steerly's ruse to get possession of the apparatus.

"Zounds, you say! We have got the steer on the hip! But what is that about that other box the rascal buried up here somewhere?"

"It is of that I wanted to speak more particularly. Budd says it was about two feet by four, as near as he could tell. He says that Steerly carried it as if it was quite heavy. What can have been in it? and what was he carrying it off into the pasture in that way for?"

"We have got to find out those things. That box must be found—and before the trial.

"Young man, can you show us where you saw Steerly making off with that box?"

"Hokey smut, mister! I guess you don't know me."

"Well, we shall if you don't guide us to the very place where you saw him last. It's got to be done in the short-

est time possible, too, if we would get around to the trial, which we must.

"I will speak to Preston for a team, and we will be off in a trice."

"Perhaps you had better take charge of this box," said Zig-Zag.

"Oh, yes; I will put that where it will be safe. Then, as soon as I get my appointment, I will notify you, when we will open it."

"Is it best to wait so long?" asked Zig-Zag, who, if the truth be told, was exceedingly anxious to see what there was within.

"Most assuredly; I do not feel that I have the power to do it now. But I will guard it faithfully."

Without further delay Zig-Zag drove his team up to the Glenwood House, and five minutes later Mr. Preston had got a team in readiness for them to start on their search.

"Give this note to the sheriff, if he comes before we get back," said Mr. Benton, "when he will understand why we are not here, and feel no uneasiness. We will get around in season."

"Now, Budd," said Zig-Zag, as soon as they had got

fairly started, "if you think you can't follow the way taken by Steerly, we had better go as directly as possible to the place where I met you, and from that point you will have no trouble to find the very tree where he hitched his horse."

"Don't you worry 'bout me. I guess I know enough 'bout g'ography to foller that air Cowly, or Steerly, right to the spot where he got out of the waggin."

"All right, Budd, only you must remember we have got very limited time in which to get back."

Mr. Benton was driving, under the direction of Budd Newbegin, and thus they must have gone five miles without the latter showing by any sign that he had recognized the way.

Even Zig-Zag was losing faith in his ability to find the place, and Mr. Benton proposed that they give it up until another time, when Budd suddenly exclaimed, joyously:

"There 'tis! there's the tree where Cowly hitched his horse. I guess when I know a thing I know it. Pull up, Bent!"

The others needed no second bidding to obey this long-looked-for announcement.

The tree pointed out by Budd was a small elm stand-

ing a few feet outside of the wheel rut. The last house they had passed was a mile back, and as far as they could see, there was no sign of a habitation in the distance ahead.

Budd had said the place was in the midst of a lonely region, and glad to have reached so near the end of their trip, Mr. Benton and Zig-Zag sprang out of the wagon without delay.

"I don't see any signs of a team having been here, Mr. Newbegin," said the selectman who was preparing to hitch the horse to the elm. "There are no tracks of a horse here."

"Then he took his tracks with him when I drove him off, for this is the place, and right 'tween 'em bushes is where I see the old duffer carrying off the box."

"Lead the way, then, as far as you saw Steerly go."

The self-conscious Budd immediately leaped to the ground, saying:

"Foller me."

Their course lay across a tract of wild land, and after going a short distance, they reached a considerable ridge, beyond which they soon lost sight of the road. After this Budd was not expected to be able to guide them in their search, which continued for half an hour without success.

"We must spread out more," said Mr. Benton. "We will each of us make a wider detour than we have done, and if still unsuccessful, will meet at the road where we left the team, to hasten back to the village as fast as possible."

With this understanding, they separated, Budd going to the north or left hand. Keeping a sharper lookout for some indication of Steerly's hiding place than of the direction he was taking, the latter at last began to think it was time to find his way back to the horse and wagon, when he found that he was lost!

Shouting to his companions, Budd at first thought nothing serious of his situation; but as he continued on without getting any reply from Mr. Benton or Zig-Zag, and apparently going deeper and deeper into the fastness of the country, he became excited, and rushed hither and thither, in a way that must have been amusing to a disinterested witness. In one of these wild dashes, however, he suddenly found himself by the highway, when he flung up his cap for joy.

All he had got to do now was to follow along the road until he came to the team, and so, choosing what he con-

sidered the proper direction, he hurried forward at his peculiar, loping gait.

Pretty soon Budd came to a wide stretch of plains land, when he ran along the level road at increased speed, until suddenly a loud, resonant sound reached his ears, causing him to look back with a gaze of fright.

As he glanced backward, a second roar startled him with its awful intonation, and as his gaze ran back to a turn in the road, he was terrified to see a huge black and white quadruped in mad pursuit!

Budd was not a coward by any means, and a braver boy than he might well have felt a thrill of horror at sight of a wild bull rushing furiously upon his heels.

Budd's only chance of escape was by flight, and if ever he flew over the ground, it was on that day. His hat soon came off, and his yellow hair stood out behind his big head in worse shape than it did at the time he was escaping from Steerly with the other's team.

The bull's fierce bellowing rang almost continually in his ears, and, glancing ever and anon over his shoulder, he could see the infuriated creature still in mad pursuit, coming nearer and nearer every moment!

Louder and louder grew the hoof strokes of the pur-

suing brute, while Budd felt his breath come quicker and weaker, as he sped along over the plain.

He looked for a tree to climb, but on that barren land there was not even a shrub to afford him temporary protection, to say nothing of a tree large enough to enable him to get beyond the enemy's reach.

Partly to allow greater freedom of his movements, and half in hope that it might attract the bull's attention, he threw off his coat as he ran, to send it flying by the roadside.

This relieved him somewhat, so he ran with renewed agility for a short distance, but he soon felt that he could go little further.

Then, glancing wildly back, he saw that his pursuer was almost beside him, and then his foot tripped, and he fell headlong in the sand!

With a fiercer roar than any yet ringing in his ears, poor Budd closed his eyes, as he felt, forever!

CHAPTER XV.

A STARTLING SITUATION.

Meanwhile Zig-Zag and Mr. Benton had pursued a fruitless search, to eventually return to their starting point.

"I wonder where Budd is," said Zig-Zag, as he looked up and down the road without seeing anything of him.

"Perhaps we had better drive on toward Norton a short distance," replied Mr. Benton, "as he would be likely to come out above us, and we shall soon meet him. By the way, I don't believe that fellow has any more idea where he saw Steerly than this horse has. It's too bad, though, that we can't find what he did that day."

"We shall doubtless find the secret out some time, if we don't to-day."

Discussing the affair as they rode on, the two had ridden half a mile or more without seeing anything of their companion.

"He can't have gone as far as this," said Mr. Benton, "and——"

"Hark! I thought I heard him calling."

"I can hear a bull roaring; that is all."

"I hear him—he is calling for help! Whip up the horse, Mr. Benton. He is in trouble."

They had reached the border of the plain by this time, and urging the horse into a more rapid gait, they soon came in sight of the unlucky Budd.

He still lay upon the ground, face downward, and at first they thought he was dead.

The bull stood a short distance off, just over a barbed wire fence, pawing the mellow earth up into a huge heap, while he bellowed and roared with fury enough for half a dozen. As Zig-Zag's gaze ran over the scene he was puzzled to know what Budd's action meant, and he shouted to the latter :

"Hello, Budd ; what is the trouble?"

At the approach of the team the bull suddenly stopped his uproar, and hearing the voice of his friend, Budd sprang to his feet, staring wildly around him.

"What has happened, Budd? Are you hurt?"

"The bull! have you killed him?" asked the confused Budd. "He chased me nearly four miles, and I just saved my life by dropping flat upon the ground and keeping still as if I was dead. Oh! he ain't dead yet!" added the

terrified youth, as the furious animal at that moment renewed his bellowing.

“He can’t hurt you, Budd; don’t you see there is a fence between you and——”

“How long has that been there?” gasped Budd, as a startling discovery forced itself upon his bewildered mind.

His companions, unable to restrain their feelings longer, burst into a hearty laughter.

The truth was, Budd had been fleeing for dear life from a pursuer which could not have reached him if he would, for the very simple reason that a four foot barbed wire fence made it well-nigh impossible. In Budd’s behalf, we wish to explain that when he had come out into the road from the wild land, there had been no fence, but that the plain had been fenced in as a pasture. In his excitement, the bull being near to the barrier, and the bend in the road tending to confuse him, it was little wonder the fugitive had not realized the true situation. We are inclined to think some of those who believe they are smarter than Budd Newbegin, might have made as sad a mistake under similar circumstances.

“Come, Budd,” said Zig-Zag, directly, “jump into the

wagon. We must get back to Glimmerton as soon as possible. It is ten o'clock now."

As limp as a rag, Budd climbed into the vehicle without speaking.

"Where is your coat?" asked Mr. Benton. "Oh, I see it; Mr. Wiswell will get it for you."

When the three got back to Glimmerton, they found the court already in session, and their appearance in the hall brought an audible murmur of relief.

The prisoner looked as defiant as ever, and when called upon to answer the charge, responded "not guilty," in a tone free from a tremor.

Zig-Zag was the first person called to deliver his testimony, and he told his story in a clear, straightforward manner which carried conviction to nearly all. Particularly that part when he told of his discovery of the pieces of the missing trunk. Then, again, Steerly's conduct at Norton was against him.

Budd Newbegin's evidence was next called for, but Zig-Zag's hopes fell when Steerly, who acted as his own lawyer, cross-questioned the unsophisticated youth. The witness' late adventure no doubt had very much unsettled his

mind, for he crossed himself in the most ridiculous manner.

“You say, young man, I carried those things out of that room while you were in it?”

“Yes, sir ; while I was asleep.”

“Asleep, and yet you saw me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Will you be kind enough to explain what means you have of seeing when you are asleep?”

Budd saw that he had made a mistake, and, in trying to rectify it, he made a bad matter worse.

“You woke up, came downstairs without any one seeing you, and finding those things loaded into a wagon, you climbed up into one of the boxes and went asleep again? Remember, your honor, this was all done in broad daylight.”

“I—I ain’t sure I went to sleep very much.”

“Didn’t go to sleep very much ! Pray what sort of logic do you call that? Perhaps by that you mean that your hands were asleep, or your feet, but your eyes—those bright eyes of yours—were wide awake. You have been guessing, or dreaming so far. Now, please tell us one thing—one little fact—that you know.”

By this time Budd was aroused, and his usually listless blue eyes flashed with the consuming fire of his anger. Though he spoke in a low tone, such a stillness had fallen upon the scene, every person in the hall heard his ominous words :

“I know, Jack Cowly, when that box is found you will hang for it !”

For the first time Steerly lost his presence of mind, besides turning deadly pale in the face.

Quickly regaining his self-possession, he demanded, hoarsely :

“Yellow cur ! who do you mean by ‘Jack Cowly ?’ ”

“You !” shrieked Budd.

“Order !” commanded the judge.

“Why do you call me by that contemptible name ?”

“ ’Cos you put me in mind of dad’s old brindle cow, which is always tearing down the neighbor’s fence and stealing everything she can get her nose on. When dad got done fooling with her, we will——”

The storm of laughter, which filled the hall, drowned the rest of the witness’ reply.

“Take the fool away !” cried Steerly. “I want no more to do with him.”

Mr. Benton was next called, and after him Mr. Preston.

Then followed the prisoner's defense, which showed a skillful battling of the strong points against him with an ability a criminal lawyer might have envied.

The result was foreseen by Mr. Benton, and as much as he regretted it, they had failed to make out a case against Steerly, so that he came out of the court a free man.

He could not conceal his feelings of triumph, and as he passed near to Zig-Zag, he hissed in his ear :

“ ‘He laughs best who laughs last !’ You will hear from me in a way you will not forget.”

“It is too bad,” said the selectman, “but we didn't prepare ourselves as we ought. I do not apprehend, Master Wiswell, he will trouble you any further. We will keep our eyes open here, and you do the same. I will let you know the moment I get my appointment, when we will see what that box contains. I suppose you feel as if you must be off.”

As Zig-Zag was booked for an entertainment at East Norton that evening, he knew every moment of time was valuable to him, so with the good wishes of his friends at Glimmerton ringing in his ears, he started for Norton Narrows at once, accompanied by Budd.

Zig-Zag's success at East Norton was very flattering, and he felt that henceforth he would get along finely.

The following evening he displayed at a place called Bymtown, and the moment the curtain was run up, he realized that he had a hard crowd to face. Resolved to do his best, however, he opened the entertainment with one of his most taking performances.

His efforts were received with an ominous restlessness, which he anticipated was the forerunner of trouble.

He had barely finished the trick, which brought forth a faint applause, when the janitor approached him with great trepidation.

"I am sorry for you, young man, but the Old Nick is going to be to pay here directly. Somebody has set up a party of hoodlums to rotten egg you and drive you out of the hall."

Though taken by surprise, Zig-Zag said, in his quiet way:

"I thank you, Mr. Johnson, but I hardly think it can be as bad as you say. I trust I shall be able to get through without any open disturbance."

"You can't! They're an ugly set from the Leathers' district, and they've come here to raise Cain. The most

of them are on the front seat, and you can see they are a tough set. Better close the meeting with some excuse, and escape by that back end window while you can."

"That would precipitate a general row at once. No, Mr. Johnson, I will remain, let the consequence be what it may. I think I can handle them."

"You can't!" repeated the janitor. "My gracious! they are going to open fire now!"

Without replying, the boy conjurer returned swiftly to the center of the stage, to face defiantly the uprising mob.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTURING A CROWD.

Quick as a flash the boy conjurer selected from the crowd in front of him the men who were likely to bring him trouble. They were moving uneasily on their seats, and turning alternately from him to one of their ilk who was no doubt their leader, sitting on the right-hand side of the house.

Evidently many of those back of this dozen had an inkling of what was coming, for they were more interested in watching them than they were in listening to him.

Zig-Zag realized that it was a desperate situation, and that he must resort to desperate measures, if he would come out victorious.

The first thing for him to do was to throw off whatever suspicion they might feel over the action of the janitor in coming to him as he had. Accordingly he said, in a tone of deep feeling:

“The gentleman who has just spoken to me has brought me bad news. All I have left of this world’s goods are the clothes on my back and the little money in my pockets. If

I have trusted others so well that they have brought this disaster upon me, I am not going to murmur.

“No, my friends,” fixing his gaze closely upon those in the front seats, “I am fortunate enough to be the possessor of a little secret worth more to me than the possession of a few paltry dollars. Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to show you, before I continue with the little feats of magic which I came here to give you, one worth more than all the others, for there are showers of money in it. Now watch me closely.

“It is not generally known that there is plenty of money flying around in the air, but I am going to prove such a state of things to you; and, what is more, I am not going to hoard it all for myself, but allow some of you gentlemen a chance with me.”

Zig-Zag had always noticed that of all the marvels of the magician not one was so sure to catch the attention of the spectators as the making of money at will. He had seen Professor Wiswell go through a long catalogue of wonderful feats of legerdemain, such as cooking soup in fine hats, taking eggs and live chickens even from ladies' handkerchiefs, conjuring snakes from bottles, and even thrusting a bradawl through the rather prominent pro-

boscis of some rural swain without eliciting a murmur of applause from the spellbound audience, to raise a howl of delight when he tricked them with the shower of money.

“The first thing I need is a good stout hat from some of the gentlemen. I used to take my own, but as I wear such a small size it don’t hold enough, for I believe in getting all you can while you are about it. This gentleman to my right has a good sized head; perhaps he will loan me his hat for a few moments.”

“The boy conjurer had purposely selected him whom he felt confident was the leader of the would-be rioters, as this would not only bring him into intercourse with the other, but better enable him to keep his gaze fixed upon the man.

Showing by his looks that his cupidity had been aroused, the person in question willingly offered his hat.

“Thank you, my friend,” said the young magician, as he took the hat, “it is a good one, and if I don’t return it to you with a silver lining you may—hi! there goes a silver dollar now, or I’m blind as a bat. It is right on hand to-night. Didn’t see it? It will become plainer as I proceed. Ha! there is a penny now. See? It is going to fall

right on the stage. There it is!" and surely enough the coin appeared in sight of all.

"I never bother with the cents ; I never pick up anything smaller than half-dollars. Here, Mr. Newbegin, you can have that if you want it. A little sense might do you good.

"Yes," continued the young wizard, as soon as the applause had died away so he could make himself heard ; "there are all kinds of money floating about us to-night, but as gold is so much harder to catch, I am not going to try and catch anything but silver. Ah! here comes a piece now. Hi! it came near escaping me, but I got it," and after clutching wildly in the air for a moment, Zig-Zag opened his right hand to display a silver half-dollar.

"I was afraid it was a quarter, but it is all right ; and here goes the first deposit into our bank," tossing the coin into the borrowed hat.

By this time the boy conjurer had wrought himself into an excited state, judging by his actions, and he began to rush about on the stage catching at what seemed imaginary objects in the air ; but more real than it seemed possible, for in a moment his exultant cries told that he had been again successful.

"Here is another!" he cried, displaying a second half-dollar and dropping it into the hat.

"Ha—ha! ain't this exhilarating! See them all about me. Now I have caught him," showing a third coin. "At this rate I will soon fill the hat. Here, Mr. Newbegin, hold this hat for me. I can't stop to run across the stage. Pass it around lively here! Isn't this a collection which would make any church happy?"

Rattling on in this way, while he danced about like a Pawnee Indian in a scalp dance, every now and then snatching a gleaming coin from the air and flinging it into the hat, the boy conjurer must have shown nearly twenty pieces, when he exclaimed:

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, for forgetting you in my excitement of good luck. This is too one-sided, and I am not selfish enough to wish to keep all this bounty of fortune to myself. I am going to let some of you into this grand collection. Let me see, who shall it be? I want three or four of the most trustworthy men here."

As he spoke, Zig-Zag ran his gaze over the crowd, until it rested upon the row in the front seat, when, as if satisfied with his choice, he said:

"I am sure I can trust you, and I know your words will not be doubted. Please step forward, my friend, if you wish to join in this harvest," addressing him whom he knew well enough was the ringleader of the suspicious gang.

"This is warm work," declared the conjurer, pulling off his coat, "and I know the ladies will excuse us, if we remove our coats. Yes, you had better take off yours, and lay it right here in plain sight. Rather I will put it on the table so all can see it. In this way every one can see that we are really doing what we pretend."

Nothing loth, the man obeyed, and Zig-Zag called upon three of his companions with as good effect. As a cover, he called upon one whom he felt certain was an outsider.

"Please step into the side aisle where I saw the coins flying thick and fast. Move as rapidly as possible, for every moment in times like this is precious. These money falls are like April showers. Ha! there is one hanging to that gentleman's beard. I know he will excuse me for the liberty I take," and to the amazement of the on-lookers they saw him take a shining half-dollar from the whiskers of a man near to him.

"It isn't every person who can boast of a mint in his

beard. Let me have that hat, Mr. Newbegin; I want to see how we are getting along. Ah! finely," picking up a handful of coins and letting them fall back into the receptacle.

By this time the five men had taken up their positions in the aisle as directed, and, glancing toward them he cried:

"Keep your eyes open now! I can see them all about you! Work if you love money! Man alive! where are your eyes? There's a brand new half in your right ear. Mine, by the right of discovery, if you please," and, darting to the side of the surprised man, he caught the glistening coin just as it was falling to the floor.

"No deception about that!" cried the boy magician.

Then, rushing to another person, he snatched a half from off his bald head, while the spectators shouted with delight.

By this time the wizard money-maker had created an excitement which can only be imagined. Unnoticed by any one, he replaced his coat while he rushed to and fro, garnering the bright coins from every quarter, all the time shouting to the men to exert themselves while the harvest was ripe.

He picked the silver pieces from men's beards, from ladies' muffs, and off of their bonnets, from out of the boys' ears and noses, and from out of the pockets of those on the front seat; in fact, from almost every conceivable place; the clinking of the coins as they dropped into the hat making merry music for the exciting scene, until at last the boy conjurer sprang back upon the platform, saying:

"I am no miser! I must have enough to pay my bills in town, so I will take up no more of your time, ladies and gentlemen.

"Mr. Newbegin, please hand those men their coats."

Then the greatest sight of all was witnessed, when Budd lifted up the coats, and it was seen that the table was literally covered with eggs.

"B'gosh!" cried the amazed Budd, "the old hen has laid herself dry."

CHAPTER XVII.

DISAPPEARANCE OF BUDD.

“Ho-ho!” laughed Ziz-Zag, with feigned glee, it has been a shower of eggs as well as money. I will acknowledge that is more than I expected. But eggs are as good as money. Why, every fresh egg there is worth three cents at the store here in town, and as I live, there are more than three dozen of them.

“Please remove them, Mr. Newbegin, and be careful and not break one of them, for fresh eggs are worth three cents apiece.

“I will hand the gentlemen their coats. Many——”

It seemed five minutes before Zig-Zag could make himself heard for the tumult of applause which filled that house. The audience had been able to stand no more, and even the ladies forgot their dignity and lent their voices to the wild huzzas of the men. The boy conjurer had captured the crowd; even the duped party upon the front seat shouted with the rest.

“Now, I will count up my money,” said Zig-Zag, as

soon as the applause had ended. "I will turn it out upon the table here, so you can all see if I count it right."

He had barely finished speaking when he turned the hat bottom up on the table, a look of surprise coming over his countenance as the expected clinking of the falling coins failed to be heard. Then, lifting the hat, no sign of the money was to be seen.

"What does that mean?" gasped the startled conjurer. "Where is my money?" looking wildly over the table and upon the floor as he spoke.

Then he began to examine the hat, to exclaim:

"I see into the mystery. There is a hole in the crown of the hat, and my money is all lost," at the same time pushing his right hand inside, to thrust his forefinger through the top until the member was seen on the outside, nearly its entire length, by the audience.

"That is just my luck," moaned the disappointed conjurer; "but never mind. It was all owing to my greediness in wanting to get so much. As I told you, I always come out so. Well, I have got the eggs left, anyway."

"Here, my friend, is your hat. I intended to divide with you the spoils; but you see how it is. I——"

"By Jove! you will pay for the damage to that hat, young man!" cried the excited owner.

"Certainly," replied Zig-Zag, smiling. "Come to look at it more carefully, I cannot see that it is injured. However, if you find I have done any harm to it I will pay you ten dollars in gold."

This time the man took his hat to examine it closely.

"Is it injured in the least?"

"No, sir."

"No hole in the crown?"

"No, sir. How in the world did you do that, youngster?"

Another burst of applause greeted this exclamation, and as soon as he could get the attention of the crowd again the boy conjurer started upon a new tack. There was no lack of interest, even the party which had come purposely to make him trouble becoming his most attentive spectators, until the curtain fell on the last act.

Zig-Zag had felt that it was possible he might meet with trouble after the closing of the entertainment, but to his extreme pleasure the entire crowd went out of the hall as peacefully as he could have asked.

At the first opportunity the janitor came to him with his congratulations.

"I don't see how you did it," he said; "but you fairly bewitched them. Do you intend to show again in town?"

"I am billed for Bymtown Hollow, which I judge is not far from here."

"Not far enough. Young man, I know this place better than you do, and I want to warn you to look out. Cancel your engagement at the Hollow, and get out of town as soon as you can. These Leathersers are very devils when they get down on a feller, and I've heard enough to know they mean mischief."

"What can they have against me? I was never within a hundred miles of this place before."

"There has been a stranger here to-day, at least a friend of mine saw a newcomer down at old Haskell's, and this Nick Haskell is the ringleader of the Leathers tribe."

In a moment Zig-Zag thought of Steerly, and asked the other for a description of this stranger.

As the janitor had not seen the unknown man, his description did not enable Zig-Zag to recognize Steerly from it.

By this time Zig-Zag, assisted by Budd, had arranged the apparatus ready for removal, and they started at once for the hotel.

This building stood back from the main street, at the head of a short lane. As they approached the house, the boy conjurer saw a man sitting by one of the windows, whom he instantly recognized as Steerly.

Stopping to get a closer look at the person, he was not quite so sure of his identity. If it was Steerly he had trimmed his whiskers very much, and had put on a pair of glasses.

In the midst of his closer inspection the curtain was drawn down so the other was lost to his gaze.

"Did you see him, Budd?"

"Nope. Say, every one of 'em eggs were rotten, so you didn't get so much out of 'em as you expected.

"I knew it. But what worries me is whether that Steerly has followed us here or not. I am afraid our trouble with him is not over."

"His won't be, if he gets in my way ag'in. I'll crack every bone in his head."

Determined to know, if possible, whether his enemy was stopping beneath the same roof with him or not, Zig-

Zag examined the hotel register without finding the other's name there. He then asked the landlord if a stranger was stopping there that night, to receive a negative reply.

If Steerly stayed in the house that night, he carefully kept out of sight the next morning, for Zig-Zag saw nothing of him, so he was fain to believe he had been mistaken the evening before in thinking he was there.

A cold, drizzling rain had set in during the night, so the day was an uncomfortable one in which to be out.

As it was scarcely two and a half miles to Bymtown Hollow, our traveling heroes were not obliged to be abroad very much.

The prospect at the Hollow was anything but encouraging. The hall was a small affair in an old, dilapidated building, standing at the junction of two roads, but without a dwelling house in sight. In fact, Zig-Zag was obliged to engage lodgings at a house nearly half a mile from the hall.

"We shan't make our fortunes to-night, Budd," he said. "But as long as the bills are out we can't do any better than to carry out our part of the programme."

While Zig-Zag had not forgotten the warning of the

janitor at Bymtown Center, he had seen nothing during the day to justify the other's fears, for everywhere he had been he had been treated civilly and even respectfully.

About dark the whole community was thrown into a state of high excitement by the news of the suicide of Nicholas Haskell, Old Nick, as he had been familiarly called, and the very worst of the leading spirits of the Leathers of Leathersville.

Why the old man had resorted to thus end his life no one seemed to know or care. He had lived alone in an old house standing upon the outskirts of the unpromising hamlet making up the notorious Leathersville.

"Old Nick's folly may turn to our good," said the boy conjurer to his companion, "as it will be likely to keep away from us to-night those who were inclined to make us trouble.

"By the way, perhaps you had better go ahead to the hall so you can keep an eye over our things until I can come. I will be along in course of half an hour. Remember and keep your eyes open."

"B'gosh! I should think you would get to know me, Zig, after a while."

Soon after the departure of Budd, the young conjurer

started for the hall, and as early as he was—it could not have been more than six o'clock—the crowd had begun to gather.

It was not raining as much as it had during the day, but the night was pitchy dark.

“The people seem to be right on hand,” said Zig-Zag, meeting the janitor at the door.

“I reckon the Holler folks don’t generally get left.”

“But the hall was not advertised to be open before seven. The entertainment does not begin until half-past.”

“Mebbe you’d keep the folks who pays you their money out in the rain on sich a night as this?”

“Oh, no; I didn’t mean that! Where is my friend, Mr. Newbegin?”

“He ain’t been here.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HARD CROWD.

"Budd hasn't been here!" exclaimed Zig-Zag, with surprise, as he looked the hall over without seeing his assistant.

"That's what I am telling you," retorted the janitor. "Mebbe he's gone a-fishin'."

Zig-Zag made no reply to this, but hastened at once to the rear of the hall, to find everything behind the curtain just as he had left them.

There was no sign that Budd had been in the hall. What did his absence mean?

About a dozen men had congregated in the hall, and having bunched themselves around the stove, were passing the time in story-telling, and an occasional coarse jest.

They were forbidding in appearance, and the boy conjurer felt that their early presence boded him no good. But he gave them little thought in his anxiety for the missing Budd.

Had the other fallen into trouble, or gone off on some wild fancy of his own? Even had he known in which

direction to look for his companion, Zig-Zag did not think it prudent to leave the stage property long enough to go in search of him.

Precisely at half-past six the party around the stove, whose number had been increased by four newcomers, marched down one of the aisles and seated themselves directly in front of the stage, each person showing by his action that he was ready and anxious for the performance to begin.

Pretending to busy himself about some preliminary arrangements, Zig-Zag watched and waited, his anxiety increasing as the minutes sped by without bringing any tidings of Budd.

In the midst of his unpleasant reflections, one of the men arose to his feet, saying:

“Look here, young man! ain’t it ’bout time you started this show? We are waitin’ for you.”

“In a few minutes, sir. It was not billed to open until half-past seven, and it lacks nearly an hour of that time now. However, as soon as my assistant comes, I will show you a few little tricks I have seen done, to pass away the time until the people all get here.”

“Reckon we’s all the people you’ll see to-night, young-

ster. And we ain't going to wait a big spell for the show to start, 'cos if it don't we'll start it ourselves."

"I may have something to say about that, gentlemen," said Zig-Zag in his quiet, cool way. "If I am but a boy in years, I want you all to remember that I have seen sights of which you have never dreamed. As young as I am, I have been in every part of the world, and in the East, where I traveled with the king of the wizards, Professor Wiswell, I have stood beside the most wonderful fakirs of that strange land, and seen better men than you turned to stone. I have seen these wonderful savants, under the walls of the Tower of Silence, perform such miracles as would blanch your cheeks and make your blood run cold. See! I hold here what is really but a bit of wood, curiously wrought by the cunning hand of an Oriental magician, but a very common wood, just the same, in that land. Now watch me closely, and see that I do not deceive you, while before your very eyes I will transform this stick into a winged serpent, which shall wriggle its slimy form across the stage, or fly into your faces as I may elect."

This tragic speech was not without its effect, and in a moment the boy conjurer had the closest attention of his

audience, until he had astonished them with his marvelous feats.

No others came, but, resolved to treat this handful the same as he would had there been a houseful, Ziz-Zag went through such feats as he could without the assistance of a companion, every one of which elicited vociferous applause.

Budd's continued non-appearance worried Zig-Zag more than he cared to show, and, when in the midst of one of his most perplexing displays of legerdemain, he came near bungling in his work, as he saw a stranger enter the hall, to march straight up to the stage, showing by his action that he had something of importance to say.

Motioning him to wait a moment, the conjurer concluded the scene as quickly as possible, and then, with a few words of thanks to the audience, drew the curtain.

"This is Mr. Wiswell, I think," said the man, who was fairly well dressed and appeared like an honest man. "Here is a line from your friend, which will explain itself."

Taking the proffered note, Zig-Zag read in Budd's scrawling hand the following message:

"DEAR SIR; I am in a peck of trouble and I want you

to come and see me hoppin' quick. Can't write enny mor but the chap who brings this will tell you oll erbout it.
Yurs, BUDD NEWBEGIN."

"What does this mean?" demanded Zig-Zag, as he finished the note.

"I can't give you a very full account of what has befallen your friend, but it seems he has got himself into a pretty serious difficulty. Nothing less than the killing of a man over in the south part of the town."

"Budd Newbegin kill a man? That must be a mistake. Why, he would not hurt a fly."

"I do not know him, and was not a witness to the unfortunate affair, which has driven a whole neighborhood wild. You will go with me to see him?"

"Where is he?"

"Under arrest at one of the officers' houses. They talk of moving him in the course of an hour, so if you want to see him we had better be on our way."

"How did it happen?" persisted Zig-Zag, who could not realize the truth of the bare statement.

"It seems he went to see the body of Old Nick Haskell, as it was hanging in the orchard, and while there Old Nick's two nephews came along and told your man to

get out of the place. He told them he wouldn't, and, as Jupe Haskell stepped toward him, Newbegin picked up a club and knocked him senseless on the spot. He lived about an hour. Of course, the sheriff was sent for, and Newbegin, or whatever his name is, was arrested while he was trying to escape. He is taking on like a baby, and if you care anything about him you had better go and see him. 'It isn't over fifteen minutes' walk from here.'

Zig-Zag was puzzled to know what to do, but knowing Budd's unstable nature, he concluded that it might be he had got himself into a serious situation, and that it was his duty to see what he could do for him. Accordingly he consented to accompany the messenger to the place.

Packing up his things, excepting a few of the most valuable, which he decided to take with him, Zig-Zag soon announced himself in readiness to start.

The few spectators of his evening's entertainment had all left the house, except the janitor who was only waiting to lock up the building.

It was as dark as ever, but his guide carried a lantern, so they had little difficulty in getting along, until it seemed to Zig-Zag they had walked more than a mile.

He was about to ask his companion, who had not

spoken since they had started, how much farther they had got to go, when he entered the yard in front of a house.

A dim light was burning within the dwelling, which he saw was a small, one-storied building, and he saw through one of the dingy windows the heads of two or three men within.

Without knocking at the door, his guide walked boldly in, bidding him to follow.

There were eight or ten beetle-browed men in the low-walled, smoky-looking apartment, and Zig-Zag had scarcely stepped across the threshold before he realized that he had unwittingly entered into dangerous company.

He started back to leave the house, when the door was closed with a loud slam, and the hoarse voice of one of the men, all of whom had sprung to their feet, exclaimed:

“Stand where you are, you rascal! You are fairly caught.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEED FITTED TO A DARK NIGHT.

After leaving Zig-Zag, Budd Newbegin had got about halfway to the hall, when he was accosted by a stranger who hailed him with the inquiry :

“Hello, young man! do you want a chance to earn a dollar?”

“Me earn a dollar?” asked the surprised Budd. “Guess you don’t know me.”

“It’s a square thing,” declared the man, who it could be seen was very well dressed, but was smoking an old clay pipe. “Is it a bargain?”

“Bargain for what?”

“I have got a little undertaking which will take two to carry out. I have got one fellow, and now if you will help me, I shall be all right.”

“Of course you will, if I help you.”

“It won’t take you over half an hour. If you will come, I will make it two dollars.”

If Budd had a weak spot, it was for money, and poor,

as he had always been, the two dollars seemed big to him. But with his natural Yankee cunning, he said:

“Make it three?”

“I shall have to, if you say so, though it’s an awful price for the work to be done. Here’s your pay, so don’t delay any longer.”

If Budd had had any doubts about the honesty of the man, it was dispelled by the sight of the money.

“Are you sure I can get back in half an hour? My boss’ll turn me off if I don’t, and I have got an all-winter’s job.”

“No doubt but you can get back in less time, if you don’t bother too long in starting.”

Budd hesitated but a moment. He reasoned that he was not really needed at the hall yet, and that he would get back by the time it would be open. So he said:

“I’m your man.”

Budd, without asking the stranger even his name, followed him down the road a short distance, when he turned into a sort of wheel path leading across the pastures.

Night so far advanced that it soon became dark, and

Budd found himself stumbling along the uneven way, until he demanded :

“Look here, mister, you may have your old three dollars, and I’ll go back, if we have got to kerwallop like this all night.”

“Almost there. See that light off to the right? That’s where we stop.”

In a few minutes they came out in front of the shanty of a house, when Budd’s companion called to some one within :

“Here, Tom! I have found a man for us. Come out with the lantern as quick as you can.”

Though no reply came from the house, the sound of some one moving about was soon heard, and after what seemed a long time, a man came shuffling out of the dwelling, carrying in one hand an old battered lantern that may have belonged to his grandfather. Inside the tin globe spluttered and flickered a short piece of candle, whose feeble glare seemed to make the darkness more intense.

“Who is he, Jim?” asked the newcomer, who looked enough like the other to be his brother.

“It’s one of ’em chaps as showed at the Center last

night. I caught him as he was going to the Hollow Hall. He's got the sand."

"Then let's have the plaguey job over and done with. Come on."

With these words, he led the way down through the field, soon coming to another building of about the same style as the one they had left.

By this time Budd was growing uneasy. Off to his left, not very far away, he could see the glimmer of a dozen or more of lights, coming no doubt from the homes making up the hamlet of Leathersville. Where were these men taking him?

"Where are you going?" he said, stopping suddenly.

"Only a few doors farther. Say, Tom, ain't we most there?"

"Hist, Jim! there's the tree! and there's it!"

The speaker for an instant held up his dim light so it shone on the space ahead, when Budd caught the glimpse of a dark form hanging limp and lifeless in midair.

It was a human body, and it quickly flashed through his mind that it was the lifeless figure of Nick Haskell, the suicide.

"Did you see it?" asked the one named Jim, his teeth chattering.

"Did you mean that cops?" asked Budd.

"Yes. Don't go any nearer, Tom. I wouldn't go down there for a million dollars."

"You ain't afraid, are you, young feller?"

"I don't see anything to be afraid of."

"I knew you had the sand. Now we want that moved, and I have got you over here to do it. Jes' take it down and carry it over 'cross the brook on his own land. We ain't going to have it on ours. It's a sure haunt to touch it, that's what 'tis. Go quick, and have it done. You have got your money. Tom will hold the lantern from here."

For a moment Budd could not realize that the men were in earnest, but their shaking limbs and chattering teeth were unmistakable witnesses to their fear.

"You ain't afraid?"

"B'gosh! you don't know Budd Newbegin. I ain't afraid of Old Nick Haskell, dead or alive. Got a knife for me to cut the string with?"

"Here's one," replied Jim, handing him his pocket-

knife. "Hurry! He don't weigh a hundred, so you won't have any trouble in carrying him."

The sputtering candle lending a weird, ghastly light to the gloomy scene, Budd would not have been to blame, if he had recoiled from the uncanny purpose; but he was not of that nature, and, nothing daunted, he boldly advanced, his every movement watched by his companions.

The rain had saturated the clothes of the dead man, so that the figure hung limp and lank. Fortunately for the purpose at hand, the suicide had not climbed high before performing his dreadful deed, so Budd had no difficulty in reaching the object, and encircling the cold, clammy form with his left arm, with his right hand he cut the rope, when the body fell its full weight in his hold.

Perhaps the excitement of the occasion lent him strength, and it may have been as light as the men had said, for Budd found no difficulty in carrying it in his arms, while he ran at the top of his speed among the trees, until he had crossed the brook.

At that moment he heard wild cries from the men, and, stumbling over an obstacle in his pathway, he came near falling, at the same time losing his hold on the body and letting it slip from his grasp.

Trying to renew his clutch, he felt the head and body separate, the last falling to the ground, while the former remained in his hands.

By this time Budd was scared, and in his fright, unmindful that he still carried the ghastly trophy, he fled at the top of his speed without knowing or caring for the direction he was taking.

Budd had not continued his wild flight far before a couple of men seemed to spring out of the ground in his very path, and one of them thrust a lantern into his face.

Giving a yell of terror, Budd dropped the head he had been holding with such an unconscious grip, at the feet of the men, and sped past them like a frightened deer.

The next moment he fell headforemost into a pit they had been digging to the depth of three or four feet.

"Heavens!" gasped one of the men, "look, Jupe! it is Uncle Nick's head!"

"And that catamount was a-stealin' it. Grab him, Lige, afore he climbs out'n thet hole."

CHAPTER XX.

BUDD GETS INTO A BOX.

Unharméd by his fall, though he had filled his mouth with the loose earth, and spluttering and clawing at the banks of the pit, Budd reached the top just in time to be clutched by the desperate men.

"Hold fast to him, Jupe!" cried the one named Lige.

Budd struggled fiercely for his freedom, but the twain were too much for him, and handling him as they would have done a wild beast, the youth was soon overpowered.

"Who is it, Lige?" asked Jupe Haskell, for the couple were none other than the nephews of Nick Haskell, the suicide.

"It's one on 'em chaps as showed at the Center las' night," replied the other.

"Sho! then we're in luck. But what shall we do with him?"

"Chuck him inter th' hole here an' kiver him up!"

Budd could not repress a shudder at this cold-blooded proposal, while he did not doubt the men were capable of doing it.

"We can't 'ford it, Lige. That diggin' is too hard for that. What has come of—of that he had?"

"Unk's headpiece? It's rolled down the hill. Wot's the imp been doin'? Speak up, ye leetle varmin," accompanying the demand with a kick which brought a groan from Budd.

"Let me go!" cried the prisoner. "I wasn't meddling with your affairs. I have got an important engagement."

"Hear th' green-headed fool!" exclaimed Jupe, laughing derisively. "I kalkilate you have got an 'portant 'gement, younker, an' that right here."

"We're diggin' that hole there for our defunct uncle's grave, now we air goin' to make it do for you, too. An' we can't go any deeper, nuther, 'cos it's too hard diggin'. Ain't that so, Lige?"

"You bet. An' we can't bother all night here, either."

"Say, let's chuck th' fool inter th' box while we git th' ol' man's carcass."

"An' another swig o' that cider. I'm ez dry ez a fish."

The men had already been drinking heavily, and what with another "swig," Budd's fate seemed sealed.

Without more delay they dragged him to the nearest

building, whence a faint light was coming, and into the shed adjoining the house.

Here the imprisoned Budd saw a box, newly made, and for a purpose which sent a shiver through his frame, as Lige Haskell pulled it forward, saying:

“Chuck him in, Jupe!”

Jupe couldn't do it alone, but with the assistance of his Herculean brother, Budd Newbegin was thrust into the narrow prison, and the box cover pressed down upon him.

“We'll l'arn you how to monkey with our dead unk!” cried Jupe Haskell, as the prisoner was finally pressed into the uncomfortable quarters. “Quick! a hammer, Lige.”

In vain poor Budd begged, and kicked, and tried to break away, for in spite of his entreaties and struggles he was not only put into the box, but its cover was so securely nailed on that he was hopelessly a prisoner.

He heard his inhuman captors say something, which he could not distinguish, and then it became silent all about him, save for his own outcries.

Had he possessed more presence of mind, he must have

known that these would not be heard for any distance, muffled as they were by the sides of his living tomb.

It was no weakness on the part of Budd if he lost his presence of mind, for no one who has not been in such a horrible situation can realize the awful agony he felt.

In his cramped position he could not bring much pressure on the sides of the box, though he crowded and strained until every particle of strength seemed to have left him.

Pausing a moment in his struggles, he thought of Zig-Zag, and wondered if the boy conjurer would ever learn of his fearful fate. Then he renewed his efforts to escape.

Succeeding in turning upon his right side, he drew up his legs as far as possible to strain at the boards so furiously that he felt them yield.

Thus encouraged, Budd lifted harder and harder, the boards bending more and more before his pressure, until it seemed they must break. Still they held, and yet he tugged with might and main.

Then suddenly there came a loud crash, when one of the boards snapped in twain, the sudden giving away causing him a shock which fairly took away his breath.

Budd quickly rallied, however, and fearing that the noise he had made in breaking the box would bring his enemies upon him, he scrambled to his feet.

It was pitch-dark in the shed, and as he hesitated for a moment trying to make out the direction he must take to escape, he heard the men carousing in the house.

Groping his way along as best he could, Budd nearly made the circuit of the inside of the shed before he stumbled upon the door leading into the open air.

He was none too soon, for at that moment Lige Haskell's burly figure appeared on the threshold of the door leading into the main house.

"W'y don't you come 'long, Jupe?" muttered the wretch, in a maudlin tone. "We can't be all night—great candles! he's out! Here he goes—come quick, Jupe, or we'll lose him!"

Budd had succeeded in getting the door open, when with Lige Haskell upon his heels he fled into the darkness of the night.

Of course, it was impossible for the fugitive to shape his course in any particular direction, and he hadn't gone very far before he found himself in front of another of

the low-walled houses which went to make up Leathersville.

A light was burning inside, and, with his pursuers close behind him, Budd quickly decided to seek the protection of the owner, so flinging open the door, he rushed in without ceremony, while he heard his pursuers close at hand.

The first room Budd entered was empty, but remembering that the light had come from the opposite part of the dwelling, he bounded across a small hall, to find himself in an apartment whose gloom was partially dispelled by a flickering tallow candle.

At first he thought the room was unoccupied, but a groan from a bed in the farther corner caused him to look in that direction. He saw some one lying prone upon its top.

"Who—hic—the demon air ye, comin' inter peaceful folks' house'n this way?" demanded the man, who was evidently the worse for liquor.

"I am hunted down by two murderers!" cried the fugitive. "Where can I hide from them?"

"Want to hide, eh?" said the man. "Who's arter ye, the officer?"

"Yes; hark! I hear them coming. Where can I go?"

"Into that chest there; it's big an' stout," pointing to the same as he spoke.

But Budd's recollection of his recent sufferings in such a place were too vivid for him to risk such a chance. At that moment his pursuers could be heard without.

"Hello, Dan'l!" called out the well-known voice of Lige Haskell, "yer see a stranger around this way?"

"It's the boys!" cried the old man, starting up to a sitting posture.

Then, as if a new light had dawned upon his clouded intellect, he exclaimed:

"It's ye they want!"

Budd felt that his situation was desperate enough for him to do almost anything, and he glanced wildly around the room for an avenue of escape. Seeing the chest for the second time, a reckless scheme of eluding his enemies entered his mind. Turning upon the man, he cried:

"Yes, they are after me, and you have got to help save me. Quick! into that trunk there. I am a desperate person."

He had opened the chest, and, as the man hesitated,

unable to comprehend the startling command, Budd seized him by the collar and jerked him upon the floor.

“Don’t kill me!” implored the terrified wretch. “I’ll do it!”

In his impatience Budd could not wait for his victim to act, and, half lifting him from his feet, he pushed the other into the roomy receptacle and dropped the cover over him.

The key was in the lock, and Budd had barely turned it, thus securing his prisoner, when again Lige Haskell’s voice was heard.

“Are you dead, Dan’l?” he demanded.

Budd uttered an unintelligible cry in response, as he leaped upon the bed, and pulled the dirty blankets around him as much as possible.

The next instant the door was flung open with a violence which sent it flying from its hinges, when Lige and Jupe Haskell, followed by two or three others, rushed pell-mell into the room.

“Has he been here?” demanded the foremost.

CHAPTER XXI.

ZIG-ZAG ASTOUNDS HIS ENEMIES.

"What do you mean?" demanded Zig-Zag, as one of the ruffians placed his burly figure against the door, thus defying all egress. "Stand aside, sir, and let me pass out."

"Not so fas', my leetle bantam," spoke up one of the others, who had taken a step forward. "We have sent for you on 'portant bizness, an' ye mus' 'scuse us ef we discomboberlate yer plans. Took a seat till th' boss comes."

Zig-Zag realized that he was among some of the worst of the so-called Leathers, but he knew it would be the best for him to put on a bold front.

"There must be some mistake, for you are all strangers to me."

"So much th' better fer us then, eh, Jake Leathers?" he said nodding to him who stood against the door.

"What's that ye say, ol' man Brady? Don't ye dare to 'dress me in that way, when ye know my name is Jake Haskell. I've warned ye afore."

"Git out with yer foolery," retorted the other. "We all know every consarned Haskell is a Leathers. As if changin' th' name o' th' bird c'u'd change its feathers."

"Ye air nothin' but a Pickdust half-breed, wuss nor a full-blood Leathers."

"Shut up, both of you!" interposed a third. "What d'ye wanter rake over thet fight fer now? Ye had better be huntin' up thet durned chap which fetched us this business. Why don't he come?"

During this highly edifying conversation, Zig-Zag had been looking around to see that the room in which they were was about ten by twelve feet, and contained two windows, and an inner door opening into the interior of the house.

"Take a seat, younker," said he who seemed to be the leader of the gang. "Ye see we air waitin' fer th' boss to come, an' th' way it looks now we may hev to look a leetle bit c' a spell. Alwus take life easy w'en ye can, has been my morter."

"I demand an explanation for this treatment of me. I came here expecting to meet a friend of mine, who this man said was in trouble. Where is he?"

"We air all yer friends es long es ye behave yersel'. Wot was th' chap's name ye were wantin'?"

"You all know well enough," replied Zig-Zag, holding up the slip of paper which appeared to carry a message from Budd.

"I see. Well, I'm sorry to say but thar chap has gone to th' bad. I don't know what they've done with him."

"Say, Jake, isn't this the same chap es showed at th' Center las' evenin'?"

"Same chick."

"Look here, younker, we're expectin' a chap here any minnit who said he had some bizness to do with you. Now, while we're waitin' we shall 'steem it a great favor ef you'll do some o' 'em funny things you did las' night. We were there, an' we'll give you th' credit o' slinging out some o' th' bes' things thet has ever come to this forsaken town. Go ahead an' make some o' that money, an', ef we don't ketch it, you may put us down fer lunkheads."

Zig-Zag realized that it was useless to argue with these men, and behind their semi-courteous treatment he knew lurked a sinister purpose. In his own mind he had no doubt but Steerly was the person for whom they were waiting. Until this man came, he was in no particular

peril, though he was closely watched, and every avenue of escape carefully cut off. Perhaps by humoring them with a few feats of sleight-of-hand he might outwit them and get away.

With this purpose in his mind, he said:

"I am always ready to display these little pranks of mine, and, if you care to have me, I will perform a little trick which will surprise you. Shall I go ahead?"

"Yes," chorused the men. "Show us your bes'."

"Very well, I will show you what I saw done a few years ago in far off India. Perhaps some of you have never heard of that country, it is so far away. To those I want to say that they have some of the most wonderful conjurers in the world. Professor Wiswell, of whom I learned my conjuring, spent many years of his life among those fakirs, and he could do very many of their feats as well as the most practiced of them.

"Now, that you may watch every movement of mine, and see that there is no trickery in what I am doing, I wish for you to all sit on the same side of the room, so you will face me. If you think I shall take advantage of the time to get away from you, you may all sit on the side toward the door. Is not that fair?"

Not seeing how they could lose any advantage by this change of position, the men quickly did as they were requested, ranging themselves along the wall with the long table between them and the boy conjurer.

“I thank you,” said Zig-Zag, taking his wand from the box of apparatus which he had brought with him. “Now, gentlemen, the little feat I am about to show you is no trick at all. It will merely show you the wonderful influence one person may have over another. I am going to subject you to my will power. You are strong men, any one of you apparently capable of doing with me as you wish. You do not realize how helpless I can make you in my power.

“I spent a long time to master this art, and it has been many a day since I have attempted to bring another under my power, but I do not believe I have lost my cunning.

“No! never! I am master of you! One, two, three, presto! Rise to your feet such of you as can!”

During this talk, Zig-Zag’s gaze had been fixed upon the little group of wondering men, while he walked back and forth, gesticulating fiercely, as he shook the magic wand in the air. Really all this display, as is usually the case with conjuring, was a cover for him to gain the time

which was necessary for him to throw that mystical power possessed by the hypnotizer over his victims.

“Can you rise?”

The agonized looks and spasmodic motions of the upper part of their bodies answered plainer than words, his question.

Not one of them could stir from his seat. In fact, their lower limbs seemed paralyzed. Move about and twist as they would they could not lift a foot from the floor.

“You see I am no idle boaster,” continued the boy conjurer. “But do not be alarmed, for I am not going to harm you. Still, for my own safety, I have one request to make. You have firearms about you. Please lay them on the table.”

Simultaneously nine arms reached out, and as many pistols and revolvers were laid upon the table.

“Thank you, gentlemen. You are good subjects for my purpose. I have a question now I want you to answer me. Who is the man you are waiting for, and who hired you to get me here?”

“He said his name was Steerly,” replied the leader of the party.

Zig-Zag was about to speak again, when sounds with-

out the house caught his attention. What if Steerly was already at the door?

The question had scarcely formed itself in his mind before the door was forced open, and four men, bearing between them a huge box, staggered into the room.

“We’ve got him as tight as a pig in a poke!” exclaimed the foremost, and then a cry of dismay escaped his lips.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLD NICK'S GHOST.

"Oh—oh—o-h!" gasped Budd Newbegin, muffling his voice with a corner of the quilt, as Jupe and Lige Haskell, with their companions, burst into the room where he had sought refuge.

"Has he been here, Dan'l?" repeated the foremost of the pursuers. "We see him come this way, an' we air arter him red hot!"

"Yas, he's been hyur—he's hyur!" panted Budd, shaking as with the palsy. "I (hic) he——"

"Been here! Where is he? Speak up, quick, fer we've no time to fool 'way."

"He (hic) he hid (hic) in thet chist!" mumbled young Newbegin.

"In thet chist!" repeated Lige Haskell. "D'ye hear thet, boys? We hev got him."

As if to prove Budd's words the entrapped man had begun to kick and cry out from his narrow prison, though nothing intelligible could be made of his cries.

"He's there, sure!" declared Jupe, seating himself upon

the trunk. "Hey, younker, how d'ye feel now? Let's see how ye look."

"Be keerful!" warned Lige. "Better keep him right in the chist till we git to 'Rastus'."

"Thet's so," spoke up Budd, still imitating as best he could the voice of the imprisoned man. "He (hic) wanted me to (hic) lock him in. Here's (hic) th' key," tossing the same out upon the floor.

"Come, boys!" cried Lige; "we're in luck. Let's tote him, chist an' all, right up to 'Rastus'."

The others lending their assistance, the Haskell brothers each caught hold of the chest, and the next moment Budd felt like shouting for joy as he saw the entire party pass out of the door.

"Hockey smut!" he exclaimed, springing from the couch upon the floor. "I wonder what the chaps'll say when they find who they've toted off? But I mustn't hang around here any longer. I'll bet Zig is getting mighty anxious about me. That show'll go bu'st, if I don't hum and get there."

Leaving Budd to look out for himself, let us follow the Haskells and their confederates with their burden.

Instead of going straight to 'Rastus', as they intended

at first, they concluded to tarry at their home long enough to have another glass of liquor apiece, which detained them so long that, as we have seen, they did not get to their destination until Zig-Zag was in the midst of his surprising adventure.

As the door was pushed open, our hero expected to see Steerly enter the house, followed perhaps by a party of his hirelings. His escape cut off, he pulled the table back toward him, and placed the firearms out of the reach of his enemies.

Instead of Steerly, the foremost of the newcomers was Lige Haskell, carrying the leading end of the chest, while his companions assisted him in this strange removal of a prisoner.

At sight of the unexpected *tableau* in the home of his associate, Haskell let the box slip from his grasp, and the others losing their hold, the object fell to the floor, whereupon a tremendous howl followed from him within, who must have suffered a fearful shaking up by this operation.

The spell over Erastus Brady and his party was suddenly broken, and as the gang sprang to their feet, Lige Haskell cried :

“What air ye doin’ hyur?”

"Wot in creation air ye a-fetchin' inter my house?" demanded the host, his attention more taken up by the appearance of the box than anything else.

"It's him we caught at Dan'l's, an' we thought it was safest to fetch him hyur jess as we had him."

"Who?"

"W'y, one o' 'em chaps as showed at th' Center las' night. We's to hev a hundred dollars, if we caught 'em by——"

"Shet up! Don't ye see him?" pointing toward Zig-Zag, who stood a silent witness of this strange scene.

Though the Haskell brothers must have noticed Zig-Zag at first, they had not seemed to comprehend that his presence there meant anything unusual, until that moment, when Lige exclaimed:

"How'd he come here?"

"Jake fetched him hyur; but look out fer him, boys, he's the very——"

"Wot in creation is all this fuss erbout, an' wot d'ye mean by bringin' me around like this?" interposed a guttural voice, and a gray head was thrust up from the chest, whose lid had been broken open by the fall.

Then there was some lively scrambling about the place,

when a man's body staggered up from the narrow prison, until a pair of long, flail-like arms waved frantically in the air.

At the sound of the voice the crowd had turned toward the speaker, when wild, excited cries followed.

"It's Old Nick's ghost!" screamed Haskell. "It was in that chist!"

With these words the terrified wretch made a wild dash for the door, knocking over two or three of his companions in his headlong flight.

The next moment Lige, with a cry of terror, followed his brother.

This was enough to arouse the others, when, with exclamations of fright, the entire lot of Leathers rushed out of the door, the startling cry filling the air:

"Look out fer Old Nick's ghost! It's arter us!"

"Hol' on, ye blarsted fools!" roared the late occupant of the chest, staggering to his feet and starting in pursuit of the others as fast as he could get along, leaving Zig-Zag master of the scene.

"Well, this beats everything I have seen," said the boy conjurer, unable to keep his thoughts to himself, as he witnessed the sudden and remarkable rout of his enemies.

"I think I will improve this opportunity to leave this place."

Accordingly Zig-Zag lost no further time in leaving the house, to find that the Haskell brothers and their precious companions had passed beyond hearing, excepting Old Nick whom he could hear a short distance away muttering and cursing himself and everybody else, particularly the last.

We might as well explain here that the hanging of Nick Haskell had been a hoax, planned and carried out by a party who did not like him. The figure discovered hanging from the limb of an apple tree in his neighbor's orchard had been but a carefully made effigy, and it was that which Budd had been hired to remove from the undesirable locality, by those who, not knowing the truth, had not dared to do it themselves.

Old Nick all the time had been sleeping off a prolonged debauch at the home of a Daniel Leathers, and, of course, it was he and not Dan Leathers whom the Haskell brothers and their confederates had carried off in the chest.

It seemed Jupe and Lige Haskell had been deceived in

regard to the fate of their uncle, as well as the rest, for they had actually dug a grave to receive his remains.

Leaving the graceless Leatherses to blunder into the truth of the peculiar state of affairs, we will go back to Zig-Zag, whose first thought after finding himself free from the disreputable gang, was to think of Budd Newbegin and resume his search for him.

The sky was clearing away, so that an occasional star could be seen, though the night was still very dark. Whither to turn to look for his friend, Zig-Zag was unable to decide.

The problem was nearer a solution than he dreamed, for he had not gone far in the direction of the thicker settled portion of Leathers district, when he caught sight of some one dodging behind a clump of trees, while a well-known voice asked:

"Mister! tell me where I've been. I mean, where I should be if I weren't here?"

"Hello, Budd! is that you?"

"Sol Ginger! whoop! it's Zig, and I'm a saved man."

"Where have you been, Budd?" asked Zig-Zag, as the other rushed to his side and threw his arms around him.

"Never's so glad to see anybody in my life. I've been

lost more than three hours, and I have tramped more'n a hundred miles."

"Impossible, Budd. But never mind about that. You are evidently laboring under great excitement. While we are returning to the house, you can tell me all that has befallen you. I am curious to know why you came up here instead of going to the hall."

"B'gosh! I guess you ain't any more cur'us 'n I am. I'll bet there ain't another feller in New Hampshire could go through half I have."

By the time Budd had made his companion acquainted with what the reader knows, they had come in sight of their stopping place.

"So you did not write that note after all, Budd," said Zig-Zag, amazed that a forgery had been so cleverly done, and he did not doubt its being the work of Steerly.

A furious rain was falling the next morning, but notwithstanding that Zig-Zag settled with his host and hired him to take himself and Budd, with their luggage, to the adjoining town, where he was billed to appear that night.

On the whole, he was glad to shake the dust, or rather the mud, of Bytown from his feet, and to feel that he had parted with the Leathers gang.

The following week was uneventful. Zig-Zag gave six entertainments to good houses, and was well pleased with his success. Budd was happy.

At the end of that time Zig-Zag received a communication, which he saw was postmarked "Glimmerton."

Hastily tearing open the envelope, he found within a letter from Mr. Benton. As he finished reading it, he exclaimed to his companion :

"Hurrah, Budd! Mr. Benton wants me to come and see him open that trunk. Now I shall know Professor Wiswell's secret."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT WAS IN THE TRUNK.

Immediately upon the receipt of Mr. Benton's letter, Zig-Zag resolved to go to Glimmerton as soon as possible. Upon inquiry, he found that his easiest and quickest way to get there would be to go by rail to a town called Lee, which would be but eight miles from his destination, and the train being an early one, he would have ample time to go from thence by team, so as to get back to the station in season to take the returning afternoon train.

It was too late to start that day, but the following morning saw him ready for his journey, and at ten o'clock he drove into Mr. Benton's yard, to be met by the selectman with a cordial greeting.

"Do you know, I looked for you to-day. I suppose you are anxious to know what is to be learned of the mystery of your late guardian's life."

Every moment's delay seeming to him an hour, Zig-Zag at last saw Mr. Benton raise the lid of the trunk with a trembling hand, for he was almost as excited as our hero.

Then they both saw the receptacle was filled to overflowing with loose papers and documents.

One by one these were taken out and hastily scanned by the anxious twain, the look of eagerness deepening on their countenances as they continued.

Everything they found seemed to relate to conjuring—the life work of Professor Wiswell. There were descriptions, carried into minute detail, of strange and unheard of feats of legerdemain as performed by the fakirs of the East. Still they searched on without finding anything clearing up the mystery of his own life.

“Ha!” exclaimed Mr. Benton, at last, “I have found something of importance now, I am sure,” and he held up to the gaze of his companion a well-thumbed bank book.

“It says: ‘Mary and Charles Stanton,’ ” said Zig-Zag. “I do not see his name upon it at all.”

“Neither do I,” replied Mr. Benton; “but it shows that those persons, whoever they are, have here to their credit over ten thousand dollars. What can it mean? Ah! here is a paper which may explain it all,” holding up a slip he had found in the book.

But both were disappointed with its brief message:

"See private papers inside mahogany box.

"W. W."

"I think you said you had that box," said Mr. Benton.

"Yes, sir; but there was nothing in it but a few circulars and advertising sheets. Perhaps Mr. Steerly had taken out everything valuable."

"I am afraid so; but keep the box with zealous care. It may be worth something to you before we get through. Ha! here's another bank account, and as big as the other. And deeds of land in India, all bearing the seal of the British Government. He must have been rich."

Zig-Zag gazed upon all this with wonder.

"See!" exclaimed Mr. Benton, "here is something I do not understand. These papers all run to James Stanton, with the name of Watterson Wiswell immediately after in parenthesis. His right name was not Wiswell, I should judge by that. Did you ever hear him use the name of Stanton in any way?"

"No, sir. But I have always felt that he had some great secret which he did not care to tell any one. Often I have seen him sit without speaking for hours at a time, and, when I would finally address him, he would start as

if he had been asleep. There is nothing more to explain the mystery?"

"Nothing. I had hoped we should learn something to show us what to do. But we are as much as ever in the dark. I will write to that bank, and it may be we shall get a clew there. When we find out who Mary and Charles Stanton are, I think we shall be on the track of the whole mystery."

Zig-Zag stayed with Mr. Benton until two o'clock discussing the strange affair, when he felt obliged to start back to Lee, to be in season for the train to Garland, where he was booked for a show that night.

Zig-Zag met with his usual success at Garland, and the following morning left for the next town, Rimmon, where he had been advertised to appear.

The night proving dark and stormy, but few people ventured away from their firesides, so the boy conjurer displayed that evening to an audience of less than a score. Of course, he did not receive enough in Rimmon to meet his expenses, but accepting that as one of the alternatives of his profession, Zig-Zag paid his bills as cheerfully as usual.

The storm cleared away in the morning, the weather being warm almost as a day in spring.

"You will have a beautiful six-mile stage ride to Haford," said the landlord of Rimmon House. "Blakely drives good horses, and I know you will enjoy it. I hear him coming now. He is always on time."

A minute later the four-horse stage running daily through Rimmon and on to Haford thundered into the yard, when all became bustle and excitement.

Zig-Zag and Budd helped load their property into the vehicle, and then clambered aboard, the first taking a seat beside the driver, while the last got inside with the other passengers. These consisted of two ladies, one a middle-aged woman with a pleasant countenance, and the other a person several years her senior, whom she addressed as "Aunt Sarah."

The road after leaving Rimmon was a gradual grade for two miles or more, and finding his companion little inclined to talk, Zig-Zag occupied his time in looking over the broken scenery, while he reflected upon his fortunes and wondered what fate had in store for him next.

Again, in imagination, he was in far-off India, and kind-hearted Professor Wiswell was with him, teaching

him the many mysteries of which he was master, but carefully guarding the secret of his own life. Ah, would enough of that secret be learned to do justice to him who had met it in such a tangle?

Then his thoughts ran into another channel, and he wondered if he would ever learn anything of his own parentage, and if he should always follow the wandering life of a conjurer, little dreaming of the strange developments which were so soon to alter the course of his checkered career.

In the midst of this medley of thought and conjecture, Zig-Zag was suddenly brought back to a realization of his situation by the gruff voice of the old stage driver exclaiming:

“Whoa, Tom! Easy there, Jim! what in the world ails you all? whoa!”

The summit of land having been reached, they were about to begin a long descent, when the horses had become restless and unmanageable.

The trouble was principally with the pole horses, and these instantly began to kick vigorously, and lurching furiously to and fro, broke into a smart gallop.

The leaders aroused by this time, they also bounded

madly down the descent, defying the efforts of the driver to hold them.

"Whoa!" shouted the man, pulling for all he was worth upon the reins; "easy, boys, easy!"

The road wound around the steep hillside, so the coach was liable to be hurled over the precipitous embankment skirting continually the right side of the way.

Seeing that the driver had more than he could do, Zig-Zag was about to lend his assistance, when one of the reins broke with a loud snap, and the maddened animals leaped on more furiously than ever.

"Look out for yourself!" cried the driver. "I——"

Tossing the reins far out over the runaway horses in his excitement, the terrified speaker leaped from his seat into the scrub thicket of bushes growing by the wayside.

Cries of horror now came from the panic-stricken passengers, the shrill voice of Budd plainly heard above the exclamations of his companions.

The reins flying in the air over the backs of the runaway horses, powerless to stay their mad flight, Zig-Zag clung to the seat for life, while he was borne on down the narrow, winding road at lightning-like speed.

In the midst of this startling situation, as he glanced

hurriedly from right to left in his lookout for some way of escape, Zig-Zag saw a man's face in a thicket of pines growing at the foot of one of the huge boulders strewing the landscape.

Though he had but a swift view of the face peering out from the concealment, it was enough for him to recognize it as the dark visage of his unremitting enemy, John Steerly, the smile of a demon making unusually hideous the sinister countenance.

The frightened team at that moment turning a curve in the downward course, Zig-Zag saw that the foot of the descent was nearly reached. But the joy this discovery brought him was turned to horror at the sight which next met his gaze.

At the very base of the declivity the road crossed a mountain stream, which, swollen by the recent rains, was running unusually swift and high, and the bridge spanning this torrent was gone.

As Zig-Zag gazed for an instant upon this awful gap toward which the runaways were rushing with such terrible swiftness, he saw only death staring him in the face.

A single word quivered upon his colorless lips:

"Lost!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PROFESSOR OR HIS DOUBLE?

Zig-Zag quickly recovered his self-possession. He must do so, or his career would end then and there.

He knew the runaway horses must be stopped before the abyss was reached, or they would all be killed. With the same thought came another of escape, and how it might be accomplished.

Then, with a nimbleness which was natural to him, he threw himself over the high dashboard and down upon the pole between the rear horses. Following this uncertain footing, he next jumped astride the nigh animal to seize upon its check rein and that of its mate.

The reins of the leaders ran through a ring in the bridles of the others, so Zig-Zag soon had these in a firm grasp.

By this time, however, the fearful crossing was so nearly reached that it would have been impossible to have stopped the infuriated brutes in season to avert a headlong plunge into the yellow, whirling waters.

But our hero had already seen that the bank of the

stream was comparatively clear of trees and brushwood for a considerable distance down stream, so, instead of trying to stop the runaways at once, he headed them along this narrow pathway at the very base of the overhanging heights.

Fortunately the leaders were less frightened than the other pair, and, obeying the bits with sure fidelity, they wheeled upon the new course, those behind them half-dragged in this direction with all that Zig-Zag could do upon their bits.

The old coach careened to one side, and for a moment it seemed it must go over, but the speed of the horses abating swiftly, the vehicle righted and remained upon its wheels.

Speaking for the first time to the affrighted animals, his voice fell with a soothing effect, and, after going a few rods, he succeeded in bringing the trembling creatures to a standstill.

None too soon, either, for a bend in the river here cut off all further progress. Perhaps this fact had something to do with the surrender of the horses, the foremost of which snorted and stamped as if aware of the danger in their pathway.

Zig-Zag was about to call to Budd for help, when the coach door was flung open and young Newbegin, looking very much the worse for his fright, leaped out upon the ground.

"B'gosh! who'd a-thought!"

"Take those leaders by the bit, Budd, and see if you can't quiet them a little."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the younger woman, following Budd out of the coach, "what has happened?"

"A little runaway, madam; but do not be alarmed any further, for the danger is over."

"I am so thankful. You hear that, aunt, the danger is over, so do not be frightened. Let me help you out of that clumsy concern."

In the course of a few minutes Zig-Zag and Budd had quieted the horses, so they were standing as docile as if nothing unusual had happened.

"I don't see what started them so," said Zig-Zag, "they—well, I do see! Look here, Budd; that beats all I ever saw. Can it be possible that driver did not know of this? Here are a lot of sharp-pointed brads fixed in the breechings of these harness, so as to stick into the horses the moment they should have to hold back any."

The truth of this statement was apparent, and while Budd and Zig-Zag were wondering over the singular fact, the stage driver appeared upon the scene, he having escaped uninjured and followed after the runaways as fast as possible.

"So they stopped, young man? Well, I wouldn't have taken that risk for a hundred thousand dollars."

"If they had been left to their own fate," replied Zig-Zag, sharply, "we should all be now in that river.

"Look here, Mr. Blakely, perhaps you can explain this condition of your harness. It has evidently been the cause of all this trouble."

The driver's surprise was greater than that of the others, and he raved like a madman.

"If ever I find out who did that, I will send him to State prison, or I'm a living liar. Who could it have been? I generally see if there is anything wrong with the harness, but this morning I was late and did not stop for anything. These horses were put on fresh just beyond Rimmon. I thought they acted more than commonly nervous."

By this time the ladies were aware of what had been done, when she who had previously spoken, said:

"I can tell you who did it; I am sorry to have brought this disaster upon you, but I did not dream he was in these parts. In fact, I supposed him dead."

"What is his name, Mrs. Marlow?" asked the old stager.

"Andrew Marlow, and I am sorry to confess, my husband. But that fact does not hinder me from saying that he is a bold, bad man, who would not hesitate at any crime to injure me. I—I——"

Here the poor woman broke completely down, but as soon as she had recovered somewhat, Zig-Zag said:

"It may not be as bad as you think, Mrs. Marlow, for I have reason to believe that it was done by an enemy of mine. At least I caught a glimpse of his evil face from his concealment by the roadside as we came down the hill."

"Yes; I saw him and recognized him. It has been five years since I have seen him, but he has not changed so much but I should know him. He is wicked enough to have done this."

"But the man I saw is no friend to me, and his name is John Steerly," said Zig-Zag, who was beginning to anticipate the *dénouement*.

"It would be like him to change his name half a dozen times, but Andrew Marlow is his correct one, and I am sorry to say that he is my husband."

Before Zig-Zag had recovered enough from his surprise to say more, Mr. Blakely interposed:

"We oughtn't let the wretch get away. Perhaps we could capture him, if we were to go back where you two saw him."

"Very true," said Zig-Zag. "Look after the horses, Budd, and I will go with Mr. Blakely to see if we can find him who has caused us this frightful adventure."

But the villain had taken himself to a safe distance before that time, so the search for him was fruitless.

As it would be impossible to cross the river, it became necessary for them to retrace their course for the entire distance to Rimmon, and then go by a different route to Haford.

Of course, their story caused great excitement at Rimmon, and the further cold-heartedness of the attempt at murder was shown when it was found that the bridge had been hewn down to make the doom of the victims more certain.

The search for the desperado proved unavailing, and

his would-be victims were obliged to content themselves with the thought that they had escaped him once more, whatever might be their fates in the future.

Zig-Zag found Mrs. Marlow a very pleasant-appearing woman, and he soon felt a warm friendship for her. In fact, he was reluctant to part from her, as he was obliged to at Haford, where she was to stop with her aunt for a few days. Her home, she said, was in Howland, and he gladly promised to visit her there, though he little dreamed under what circumstances he would fulfill that obligation.

Three days later the boy conjurer opened an entertainment in a place called Middleton, where he was received by one of the most crowded houses of the season, though he had seen on the afternoon before that the hall, which was on the second floor, was in an old, dilapidated building, the lower story of which had long since been vacated.

In the best of spirits he began with the egg trick, and, wishing to enlarge upon it, he called upon some one in the crowd to come forward as a subject for him to experiment upon.

In answer to this request some one arose in the rear of the hall and came down the middle aisle toward the platform which had been raised for the performer.

Zig-Zag was in the midst of one of his descriptions of what he proposed to do, when he looked at the man approaching, and the words died upon his lips.

It was little wonder his tongue refused to do its duty, for the man was a living likeness of Watterson Wiswell.

So exact was the resemblance that the young performer was about to address him by the name of his dead friend, when Budd Newbegin rushed to his side, exclaiming:

“Jump out of the window, quick, for your life, Zig! The floor is breaking down.”

CHAPTER XXV.

SOMETHING STRANGE.

Budd's excitement aroused Zig-Zag from the spell which the appearance of Watterson Wiswell's double had thrown over him, and he turned to his companion with surprise.

"It's so!" protested Budd. "Hark! I can hear it cracking. She's going! See her settle?"

By this time Zig-Zag was aware of the truth of the startling announcement, and he could feel the floor yielding beneath him, though the audience seemed unconscious of their great peril.

"Let's jump out of the window!" exclaimed Budd, his face the color of a sheet, while he shook like an aspen.

In a moment Zig-Zag's rare presence of mind asserted itself, and he said to Budd, sharply:

"Stop! Not another word, unless you want to create a rush here," and the other suddenly became silent, though trembling in every joint.

Zig-Zag realized that the hall had got to be cleared at once, but it would never do to announce the fact of the

situation, else a panic would follow, which would only add to the terrible peril of the scene.

A less clear head and cool heart than his must have faltered in this awful ordeal, and almost any one would have followed Budd's advice, and sought his own safety at the sacrifice of the others.

Like an inspiration came to Zig-Zag's fertile mind the way of escape from the awful dilemma, and, springing back to the center of the platform, while he waved his magic wand in the air, he cried:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry, but I have just discovered that I cannot show to you the most marvelous trick known in the range of conjuring on account of the lowness of these walls. Now, if you will please leave the hall, outside I will astonish you with the most wonderful feat ever performed by the wisest fakirs of the land of the rising sun. Please move out as rapidly as possible without stepping on your neighbor's toes. Those in the center aisle pass out first. Let the rest remain seated until they have left the room. Do not delay."

Though taken by surprise, that portion of the audience designated, without dreaming of the real object underlying this request, hastily obeyed, a prayer of thanksgiv-

ing rising upon the boy conjurer's lips, as he saw them file out of the death trap.

"Row of seats upon the right," said Zig-Zag, as the main body had passed the door, and he felt there was no further cause for alarm.

Budd was still standing speechless and white as a ghost, when the last of the crowd had left the hall, and he and Zig-Zag were left alone.

"Come, Budd, brace up; the danger is over. Help me carry the apparatus outside."

"B'gosh, I never see such a feller as you are, Zig."

Upon rejoining the crowd, which stood without the building, expectantly awaiting him, he found that it had already been apprised of something of the danger they had escaped, so it needed but a few words from him to make the situation plain to them.

Half wild with suppressed excitement, one and all pressed around their deliverer from a horrible fate, wringing his hands and thanking him for his noble conduct, while the tears stood in the eyes of many.

As soon as he could, Zig-Zag addressed them; saying he did not wish to disappoint them of their entertainment,

and if there was another hall convenient, he would resume his programme.

But there was no building in the place suitable, and when he had learned this, he said:

"I am sorry to deprive you of even a part of the pleasure you expected to-night, and while it may not be convenient for me to carry out my original plans, I will see what I can do to interest you. I wish you would, all who care to witness this little side show of mine, come up to the common, where I shall have ample room to act."

Fortunately the night was warm, and a full moon in a cloudless sky made it nearly as light as day.

The common was only a few rods from the hall building, so that the crowd had quickly gathered around the boy conjurer, anxious and expectant.

"As I told you," began Zig-Zag, when he had made a few preliminary arrangements, "I cannot carry out my original plans, and this little feat of legerdemain, or deception, or conjuring, whichever you may choose to call it, is a performance I have never undertaken in this country, though I have often thought I would like to do so. I will confess that I have hesitated only because among the enlightened American people it is not easily done, and

that I may fail. I have never known but one man this side of the globe to do it, and if he is present here to-night, I cannot accomplish my purpose.

"I wish the gentleman who was to assist me in the hall would come forward."

Zig-Zag's manner betrayed nothing of the anxiety he felt, while he waited for the other to join him, until satisfied he did not intend to acquiesce.

"Can any one give me the gentleman's name?"

"He is a stranger in town," answered one of the on-lookers. "He has worked a few days for Sam Johnson, but I think he finished his job to-day."

With this unsatisfactory information, Zig-Zag was obliged to continue:

"Never mind; if I need any help, some one else will do just as well. But before I begin, I want to warn you that the feat I am about to undertake has never been done by any man, nor will it ever be, and yet I am going to make you believe that I am doing it. So then, watch me closely. Do not let your gaze leave me for an instant, lest you miss the secret of this great and wonderful feat. Again I must say, if there is a person in this crowd who knows my secret, I shall fail. Watch me closer—closer!

See me smite my fists together—smite them until the sparks fly from the very nails!

“Hark! what sound was that? I thought I heard a dog barking in the sky!”

During this impassioned speech Zig-Zag had been working himself into a frenzy, while a deathlike stillness had fallen on the scene. Then, as the boy conjurer listened with the others, a low, but distinct bark of a dog came down to them from the space overhead.

Plainly heard twice, it was then prolonged into a pitiful wail, as if the creature was in distress.

The crowd stood with open-mouthed wonder, unable to comprehend that a dog could be in midair, and yet not a person present could dispute, without doubting his own senses.

“Has any one lost a dog?” asked Zig-Zag, showing great concern in the matter.

“Yes; I lost my little pet Blackie yesterday!” answered a voice from the rear of the crowd. “Oh, mister! please get him back to me if you can.”

“Then it’s a black dog you lost,” said Zig-Zag. “That sounds like a black dog’s bark. He has wandered off into

the sky, it must be. Still, I cannot see him, though I can look up half a mile or more."

"Bow-wow-ow-ow! ki-yi! ki-yi-yi!" reached their ears, louder and plainer than ever.

"That dog is in great trouble over something," declared Zig-Zag. "Perhaps he wants to come down from his dizzy perch, but don't know how. A dog is a good deal like a child—always running into trouble without thinking of a way out. Of course you will allow me to postpone my amusement long enough to see what I can do for the little fellow.

"Hi, there, doggy! jump—jump for your life!"

A dismal howl answered this command, but no dog appeared.

"He is afraid to jump," said the boy conjurer; "and I don't know as I blame him. Now, if I only had a cord or line of some sort, I would hand it up to him, so he could come down on that. Have any of—— Hold on! I have with me just what I want. How fortunate."

While speaking, Zig-Zag took from one of his boxes a large roll of stout twine, which he began to reel off very rapidly, by winding from his left hand to the elbow.

The piteous cries and howls seemed to increase, until at

last Zig-Zag, crouching almost to the earth and swinging his arm after the fashion of an experienced pitcher in a baseball club, cried :

“Now see me send up a ladder for doggy to descend by,” and, suiting action to the words, he sent the ball of twine flying into the air—up, up, until it had become a mere speck in the sky—up, up, up, until it disappeared among the stars, when the amazed spectators witnessed the remarkable sight of seeing a cord suspended from midair, and seeming to reach from the sky to the earth !

Not a person was capable of speaking, not one moved, while the young wizard shouted, his white face fixed upward :

“Now come down by the rope I have hung for you, my little black dog.”

A heart-breaking wail was the only response, if that could be called such.

“He is still afraid,” said Zig-Zag. “I shall have to send some one up after him. Who is there in this crowd who will volunteer to go upon this humane mission?”

As might have been expected, no one offered to undertake the apparently impossible feat.

“Is it possible there is not a man among you who has

the moral courage to rescue that poor dog?" exclaimed Zig-Zag, with evident disappointment. "Well, never mind. I have a friend with me who will go into a cannon's mouth for a nest of robin's eggs, if I tell him to do so.

"Budd Newbegin, climb that line and bring down that dog. Mind you, do not hurt the poor creature."

"I can't! I darsn't!" whimpered Budd, who was shaking as if with the palsy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ADVERTISED.

“Dare not!” exclaimed Zig-Zag, contemptuously. “What do I keep you for, anyway? Budd, mount that ladder, and climb till you reach that dog, if you have to go to the stars.”

Budd looked appealingly toward the spellbound spectators, and then, without a word, seized hold of the dangling cord and began to claw the air, as if in the act of climbing.

Then, to the utter amazement of the lookers-on, he arose into midair, going up step by step, while his body swayed to and fro above them.

Zig-Zag was waving his wand furiously, while his gaze was fixed upon the ascending youth, who went higher and higher, until his form grew indistinct in the pale moonlight. Still he mounted the frail support, foot by foot, higher and higher, until he was lost to view.

“Keep on!” shouted the boy magician, frantically, swinging his wand over his head in a circle until its gyrations seemed to form a huge wheel.

The spasmodic moving of the line proved that the climber was still ascending, until at last the cord hung limp and motionless.

"Have you reached him?" called out Zig-Zag.

"Ya-as," replied the well-known drawling tone of Budd. "He is the blackest black dog I ever see."

"Well, send him down here, and don't be all night about it, either."

Immediately following this command was a series of howls and barks from a dog, mingled with the cries of a human being, while the cord shook violently, as if some great commotion was taking place upon it.

"Oh—oh! he's biting me!" cried Budd. "He's pulling my no-ose off!"

Under less exciting circumstances, the scene must have provoked hearty laughter, but as it was, one and all watched and waited with breathless interest.

"Hurry up!" shouted Zig-Zag, giving the cord a shake.

"Don't! don't!" exclaimed Budd. "You'll shake me off. I have got all I can do to fight this dog! He's going to eat me up."

"Kill him!" replied the boy conjurer, "if you can't do any better. Cut off a paw; that will fix him."

“Just as you say, Zig,” and then followed the sounds of a furious struggle between man and beast in midair, until finally something was seen to come down from the scene of action, falling at Zig-Zag’s feet.

Picking the object up, he held between his thumb and forefinger a dog’s paw.

The next instant this was followed by another; and then the creature’s head fell with a thud upon the ground, accompanied, the moment later, by the body.

“Good!” exclaimed Zig-Zag; “you have done well. Now come down yourself.”

Again the cord began to swing violently; but turning from this, the conjurer picked up the parts of the dog, placing them together as he did so, saying:

“Poor little doggie had a sorry time. Well, he is all right now; but I should advise him to get home as quickly as possible.”

With a yelp of unmistakable joy, the little black canine leaped from Zig-Zag’s arms and darted in among the crowd, to disappear almost instantly.

At this juncture, Budd Newbegin reappeared, coming swiftly down the swaying line, until he stood safely upon the ground.

Then the cord fell in a coil at the boy conjurer's feet, while he, with great beads of perspiration standing out upon his face and hands, stood before the spectators with bowed head and hands clasped together.

It seemed a long time before the spell was broken—before the amazed throng could throw off the charm which had bound them—and then the night welkin rang with the pent-up shouts of the admiring crowd.

Never had the good people of Haford witnessed such a sight as that, and it might be they never would again, for the feat just performed by the boy conjurer was among the most wonderful illusions of the eye and imagination the trained mesmerist ever undertook to thrust upon his victim.

The ordeal had nearly prostrated Zig-Zag, and he was glad to take advantage of the applause to regain his overtaxed energies.

As soon as he could make himself heard, he thanked the crowd cordially for its hearty appreciation of his efforts, following his remarks with a pleasing example of his powers of mimicry and ventriloquism, when the spectators, declaring that they had been more than satisfied, dispersed for their respective homes.

Glad the affair was well over, Zig-Zag returned to the hall to look after his property before going to his stopping place, Budd following him, silent and apparently plunged into a deep meditation.

"Wake up, Budd," said Zig-Zag. "Did your ascent into the starry regions make you sleepy?"

"B'gosh, Zig! would you a-thought I could have done it? Say, I'll bet there ain't 'nother chap as could done it. Do you think so?"

"No."

"B'gosh! I'm going to try that ag'in some time."

"Let me know, Budd, for I want to be there."

From Haford, Ziz-Zag went to a still smaller town, his journey taking him into a mountainous district, so thinly settled that he wondered many times where all the people came from who attended his entertainments. But as long as his success continued good, he could not complain.

One thing puzzled and annoyed him almost continually now. Wherever he went, he was pretty sure to see the stranger, whom he had first seen in Haford, and who so strongly reminded him of Professor Wiswell. This person had the same tall, stooping figure, broad shoulders, gray, grizzly beard, deep-sunken, piercing gray eyes,

kindly, benevolent-seeming features, and yet, with all these, something which made him act and look like another individual, as of course he was.

He invariably came into the hall late; always stood near the door, and glided out, to disappear, before Zig-Zag could reach his side.

One evening, however, by darting out of a side door, the moment he had concluded his performance, the boy conjurer succeeded in meeting the other, as he descended the stairs in no evident haste.

The moment he came into close contact with the strange man, all resemblance to Professor Wiswell vanished, and he no longer felt that he was a relative, which hope he had fondly cherished. He felt uncomfortable in the other's presence, and was glad when he could civilly bid him "good-night."

After that he gave him less thought, though he continued to wonder why the uncommunicative unknown should persist in following him.

He felt it certainly boded him no good, and he began to feel uneasy whenever the cold, gray eyes were fixed upon him.

Eventually he found himself in a small town called

Bossville, which was located on the right bank of a small river. Across this stream was another village about the size of Bossville, and expecting the inhabitants of this place, which was a thriving looking hamlet, would attend his "show," he would be likely to have a large audience.

He was soon struck by the peculiar fact, however, that the two towns, lying so closely together, had no evident means of intercourse. A little later he was told that a strong rivalry existed between the settlements, and he need not expect any from over the river to patronize him that night.

Nothing discouraged by this statement, he went on with his arrangements, and at seven o'clock that evening he had the satisfaction of seeing a crowded house.

"Bossville don't do anything by halves," said one of her citizens, proudly, as Zig-Zag entered the hall. "So do your best, young man, and you'll hear some of the loudest hollering to-night you ever heard."

Before Zig-Zag could reply to this rather bombastic speech, a hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder, and, turning abruptly, he found himself face to face with a burly-framed, bewhiskered man of ponderous frame.

"Be you the chap as runs this show?" demanded the stranger.

"Yes, sir.

"And you mean to show in this hall this evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"What in thunder do you mean by that, young man? Mebbe you think you can fool a whole house full of folks across the river, but you'll find yourself something wuss'n a fool, if you try that little game."

"I do not understand you," replied Zig-Zag, who saw that the man was laboring under great excitement.

"Heap ignorance on injury, would you, you little runt? As if you didn't know you were booked to show across the river to-night, and every man, woman and child in Bossville East has got together to honor you. And you a-showing over here among these low-downs. Young man, just go back with me, or I'll pull your head out of your collar. We ain't to be trifled with."

Zig-Zag tried to pacify the man and to have him state clearly his grievance, but the more he said, the wilder the other became. He soon learned, however, that the rival villages were known respectively as Bossville West and Bossville East, and that, through some unaccountable

blunder of his advance agent, he had been advertised to appear in both of the places at the same time!

“I am sorry for the mis——”

“Sorry don’t cure the disease, mister, and you’ll either go back and give your show as you promised at our hall this evening, or you’ll never give another. A whole house full of folks ain’t to be fooled in this way.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW DANGER.

Zig-Zag could not fail to see that the speaker was terribly in earnest.

The bystanders had suddenly become silent, while they listened to the threatening talk.

Of course it would never do for him to leave the audience here to show at another place, while it was as equally certain that it would not do to trifle with their rivals.

With all his ready wit and fertility of resources, the boy conjurer was, for the moment "stumped," as the expression goes.

"Let me speak to my partner," he said, more to gain a little time than from any expected benefit he could anticipate from Budd.

"Got a partner, eh?" demanded the representative of Bossville East.

"Yes, sir. You did not expect I could run a combination like this alone, did you?"

"Hadn't thought anything about it. But I'll tell you

that that air crowd 'cross the river ain't going to wait much longer, so make your story with your partner short."

Nodding to him, Zig-Zag motioned to Budd for him to step aside so he could speak with him alone.

As he passed a knot of men grouped about the stove, one of them caught him by the sleeve, saying, in a low, threatening tone:

"Look here, young mister! You don't mean to go back on us fer 'em hoodlums 'cross th' river, do you?"

"Never fear that," replied Zig-Zag; "I know my friends."

"Bully for you, young man. Give us a blowout that'll s'prise 'em Easterites. I don't mind tellin' you that we knowed you were billed for both places, but we kept th' ball rollin', 'cos we were bound to beat 'em other fellers. Now if you go back on us, you'll smell tar fer six months, an' you'll wear more feathers 'n you need when you become a bloomin' angel! Ain't thet so, boys?"

"You bet."

Zig-Zag realized that his situation was too delicate for him to resent the speech, and merely bowing to the slovenly-appearing speaker and his companions, he led Budd

aside, where he could converse with him without being heard.

Budd soon showed that he had had his eyes and ears open, for he was well aware of the situation, so our hero had few explanations to make.

"It's an awkward fix, Budd," said Zig-Zag, "and I see but one way out of it. Can I depend upon you to carry out just what I ask you to do?"

"B'gosh, Zig! I should think you had got to know me by this time," replied young Newbegin, in a tone which showed that he felt as if he had been insulted.

"Excuse me, Budd. Now then, I want you to take a few boxes and packages—things I shall not need here—and go over the river, to tell the crowd there I will be along directly. Tell them anything you wish, so long as you keep them quiet until I can get there. But before I can leave this hall I must give at least the greater part of the programme. But I will look after the fellow who came after me, so all you will have to do will be to keep the crowd quiet across the river for something like an hour. Can and will you do it?"

"Say, Zig, can I give 'em a show of tricks? I have got 'em air things mighty fine."

"Anything, only don't get into trouble yourself."

Without further delay, our hero returned to the impatient waiter, followed by Budd.

"It's all right," said Zig-Zag; "I am going with you just as soon as I can get started. Won't you come and help me pick up the things?"

The broad smile upon the other's sunburned visage told as plainly as his words that this arrangement afforded him unbounded delight.

"I reckon we'll show these air low-downs they ain't in this show. I should advise you not to come here again after fooling 'em this time."

The spectators showed that they were surprised to see one of their hated rivals walk down the aisle of their hall, but to Zig-Zag's relief, no outcry was made.

"Here, Mr. Newbegin," said Zig-Zag, handing his companion a few articles, such as he knew he would not need in giving an entertainment, "you can go ahead and tell them we are coming as soon as possible. No doubt they are getting uneasy."

"Pleased at this, the stranger saw Budd march down the aisle out of the building, while he waited for the boy conjurer to gather up the rest of the things.

"Here, mister, you hold this box, while I pack some of the smaller articles into it. You might as well be seated. And say, I suppose I shall have to say to these folks how matters stand, and let them down as easily as possible."

"Of course," assented the other. "Say, let me do it."

"No; that wouldn't do. They wouldn't let me get out of the house."

"Well, don't you spare 'em, but let down ker-chunk!"

Without replying to this advice, the boy conjurer turned to the audience, saying, in his smooth, silvery tone:

"Ladies and gentlemen, circumstances over which we have no control have often changed the entire course of our lives; events apparently insignificant in themselves have altered the fates of nations; and to-night—ha! pardon me, my dear friend!" he suddenly broke off, turning to him from Bossville East, "but there is the gleam of gold about you. It lurks in your eyes; it hides in your whiskers! I know you will allow me to save this piece for you," and suiting action to words, he plucked a gold dollar from the man's beard and dropped it into a box standing on the table.

"Another, as I live! Why, man alive! you are fairly

running over with these precious golden slices. Have you just come from a mint? Or are you a mint yourself? I believe you are!" and, while rattling on in this way, Zig-Zag continued to pick gold dollars from the man's ears, nose, beard, hair, from his clothes, and even from the palms of his hands, while he sat amazed.

"Hold your hat, please, and I will save them for you."

Speechless and motionless, the man allowed the conjurer to take his hat, into which he could hear the dollars drop with a merry jingle, which awoke his avaricious nature, and drove everything else from his mind.

The audience was watching with intense interest, and once he had brought the other under his control, Zig-Zag did not let up on him from "over the river."

Nothing in conjuring counts like the influence of the eye, and next to it, the rapidity of action. Zig-Zag lost no advantage in his play with either.

The moment he felt the money trick was losing its hold, he turned to the flying coins, to the egg trick, the wonderful handkerchief, the stuffed hat, and others, passing from one to the other so swiftly and adroitly that he kept the spectators in a continual roar of merriment,

while he who had come to get him away, sat a spell-bound witness.

“Hold out your hands,” he said to his victim. “Place them together cup-shaped, so they will hold water. That will do. Now, one and all, see me pour this clear spring water into his palms, and then watch the effect. See! it turns green—green as his own manners. Ah! it becomes a jelly; it’s as hard as stone! Behold! as I touch it with the magic wand, a living snake rises from the mass! It coils and hisses about the wand! Ugh! it looks ugly. Down, hideous thing! I will none of you,” and tapping the creature on the head, he dropped it into the glass from which he had poured the water, when it seemed to dissolve and fade away.

“The glass is empty!” declared the conjurer, turning it bottom up in sight of the audience. “Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your kindly attention, and when we next meet, I trust it will be in good fellowship.”

Then, while the very rafters shook over their heads with the tumultuous applause, Zig-Zag turned to him from the rival village, saying:

“Now we will go over and amuse your folks.”

Even then the other seemed not to have found his

tongue, for, without a word, he helped the boy conjurer pick up his apparatus and followed him out of the house.

Two men were anxiously awaiting them when they reached the bank of the river, where a boat was pulled up on the sand.

“ ’Pears like you be gone all night, Jim!” growled one. “Pile in there.”

Though he liked the appearance of these men less than that of the one who had come to the hall, Zig-Zag did not dream of danger to himself, until they were midway in the stream, when he detected the one in the stern making a swift signal to the others.

Then the rowing suddenly stopped, and before Zig-Zag could defend himself, a grasp of iron was around his neck, and he was hurled into the bottom of the boat.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BUDD'S REMARKABLE PERFORMANCE.

Budd Newbegin left the hall at Bossville West with a conscious feeling of his importance in the affair upon hand, and in his mind he was resolved to carry out his employer's wishes to the letter. If he failed in doing that, let it be said to his credit, it was no fault of his intentions.

A boatman was at the river bank, who quickly carried him over to the other side, and the building, holding at that time the inhabitants of the town, to the children even, was pointed out to him.

If the house upon the other side was crowded, this one was packed, so Budd had hard work to reach the narrow platform at the farther end.

His appearance upon the stage was hailed with a noisy demonstration, which fairly took away his breath.

Though he had faced a crowd many times with another, he was amazed to find how much difference it made to be alone. Still, it would not do for him to show any weakness now, and, bowing low to the audience, he

started off upon a speech, which he had conned over to himself on the way there :

“Ladens and gentlemies! I’m Fesserpro Riverwis overcome to tell some you misshow have staked. I—I mean I’m on t’other riverside, an’ Fesserwis Prowell is riverside on this!”

Here poor Budd broke completely down, looking exceedingly red in the face and unable to tell whether he was in Bossville West or its rival East.

“Hear him!” shouted one of the spectators. “Go on with yer show, professor, and give us something which will make ’em lunkheads on t’other side itch with envy.”

“Go on!” chorused the throng.

Budd glanced wildly over the crowd, and if there had been any possible way for him to escape, he would have bolted the scene without further ado. As it was, he shook from head to foot, while the on lookers, unable as yet to understand what the trouble was with him, shouted and yelled to him.

All of Budd’s presence of mind seemed to have forsaken him, and when he opened his mouth to speak, not a word came forth.

Some of the crowd may have thought this pantomime

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of his was a part of the entertainment, for they looked on with open-mouthed wonder.

Others anticipated that in some way they had been duped, and they shouted out their wrath in no unmistakable terms.

"Give us back our money or go on with your measly old show!"

"I'm Fesserwis Prowell!" stammered Budd, unable to get beyond that miserable falsehood.

"We know it!" howled the crowd. "Ain't we come out here, big an' little, to see 'em rinktums showed on yer yaller bills? Go on with the circus, an' if we don't shout louder'n 'em wolverines on t'other side, you may stuff us with cotton an' use us for sponges. Go on with some of your sleight-of-handers. We want to see the snakes, and 'em other funny things you tell about."

Budd realized that his situation was becoming critical, and unless he could do something to check the rage of the crowd, he must fare without mercy at their hands.

Determined to set himself right in their estimates this time, he again attempted to address them:

"Lagents and mentlemies! I'm Prowell Fesserwis! I mean that I'm he and he is I; that is——"

"Hear! hear! Why don't you talk Mingo?"

Following this was a stormy tirade, during which Budd stood as motionless as a statue on the platform, and looking as white as a sheet.

"The poor man is sick," cried a female voice from the front seat.

"Or crazy as a loon!" cried a stalwart six-footer from the back of the house.

At this moment an even worse turn was given the unhappy situation by the appearance of a man at the door with the electrifying announcement that the Westerites were at that moment enjoying a rousing show by the renowned wizard, who had advertised to show to them at that very hour!

"This fellow is an impostor——"

"Put him out of the hall!"

"Give us back our money!"

"Ride him out of town!"

"We have been humbugged! Give him a coat of tar and feathers!"

Losing what little wit they had possessed the minute before, the men began to rise up *en masse* all over the hall, and a tall, raw-boned Jonathan, swinging his arms

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over the heads of his companions, hurled a missile at the person of the terrified youth.

A wild cry came from Budd's lips, as he saw his peril, and, seeing no way of getting out of the building, he rushed across the stage and began to climb the wall.

The house was a one-story affair, which had never been finished inside, so the timbers stood out full size on the walls, while overhead the roof formed the only ceiling.

We can't tell you how he did it, for his own mind was never clear upon the subject, after the excitement was over, but Budd scaled that rough wall like a squirrel!

Nor did he stop at the top of the post, but, catching in between the cracks in the roof boards, he ascended one of the rafters, until he hung cross-legged over the "holders"—stout boards nailed from rafter to rafter, to keep the building from spreading—close up under the ridgepole.

There he clung like a huge spider, while the cobwebs, which he had dislodged, floated down into the upturned faces of the spectators.

"Knock him down!" cried half a dozen, in the same breath. "We've been humbugged!"

In the midst of the hue and cry which followed, while Budd baffled the attempts of his persecutors to dislodge

him, a clear, ringing voice startled every person in the house.

“Hold! what means this wild disturbance?”

In order to keep even with events, let us go back to Zig-Zag, when he was assaulted in the boat.

The attack sent him backward over the seat upon the bottom of the boat, as we have described, but that fall enabled him to deal his assailant a furious kick in the stomach, which hurled the man back with such force that he toppled into the water, with a cry of pain.

This movement gave the boat such a sudden plunge that Zig-Zag's other enemy loosed his hold upon him, so our nimble hero twisted himself free.

Then, before his more clumsy opponent could rally, he pitched him overboard, to seize the oars and row for the shore with what celerity he could.

Knowing there was little or no danger of the men drowning, he did not give the matter more than a passing thought, while he looked forward to his own escape.

Bewildered by their unexpected immersion, the two men were carried down stream a considerable distance before they could effect a landing.

Zig-Zag had barely touched the bank before the tumult

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from the hall reached his ears, warning him that Budd was in trouble.

Quickly gathering up his apparatus, he ran at the top of his speed toward the building, the cries growing louder and fiercer as he approached, until he suddenly appeared upon the exciting scene, with the fearless cry:

“Hold! what means this wild disturbance?”

CHAPTER XXIX.

READING THE RIOT ACT.

"B'gosh, Zig! I never was so glad to see you in my life!" cried the shrill voice of Budd Newbegin from among the rafters, as a silence fell suddenly upon the scene immediately following the boy conjurer's fearless command.

Glancing swiftly in that direction, our hero was amazed at seeing his companion dangling from his precarious situation, looking, as we have said, like a huge spider.

Under less exciting surroundings, he would have presented a most laughable appearance.

The crowd had turned from their terrified victim to the newcomer, whom one and all quickly understood was the boy conjurer.

Zig-Zag, realizing that Budd had failed in his undertaking, and without blaming him or the disappointed audience, he said :

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to have been unable to come here sooner, but 'better late than never,' as

our copy books used to say, and what is the use of having copy books, if we do not follow their teachings?"

As swiftly as a summer shower, the storm disappeared.

"It's the Oriental Wizard!" some one said, loud enough to be heard by his neighbor, when others took up the cry, until a vociferous cheer rang over the house, during which applause Zig-Zag reached the platform, and faced his audience with a smiling countenance.

It was surprising how quickly the scene had changed.

"If you will bear with me just a few minutes longer, my friends, I will promise to make up for what disappointment and anxiety I have caused you."

Then, looking up toward Budd, he could not refrain from saying:

"What! climbing to the stars again, Mr. Newbegin?"

"I am sure the good people present will excuse our friend for his ambition to rise, as it is just as natural to him as it is to an angel."

"B'gosh!" exclaimed Budd, as soon as he could make himself heard above the applause of the crowd. "I'll bet ther ain't another chap here as could climb up to me."

"I hardly think any one feels like competing with you,

Budd," replied Zig-Zag. "But now you have shown us what you can do, why don't you come down?"

"B'gosh! I can't!"

This soon became evident, for when Budd tried to descend from whence he had quickly climbed, in his excitement, he grew dizzy and lost his courage.

Seeing that he was in danger of falling, Zig-Zag said:

"Hold, Budd, and some one will get a ladder for you."

While this was being done, the young wizard went on with his preparations for the entertainment, so it was not long before he was astonishing the spectators with his marvelous performances.

Having got the good will of the audience by his mild way of "reading the riot act," he resolved to do his level best, and never during the season did he "give more for the money" than he did that evening to the people of Bossville East.

His wit seemed to run like an electric current through the house, and he kept the spectators wild.

"Heavens to Betsy, young feller!" cried one of the men, "we air going to build a new townhouse next year, and we want you to be sure and come and give some

more of 'em things. Come sure, and we'll turn out if we fill the house so full we bu'st it!"

Zig-Zag concluded to say nothing of the attack made upon him in the boat, now the inhabitants of Bossville had become so friendly, though he was puzzled to know why it had been made.

At any rate he saw nothing more of the men, and when he left Bossville, the next morning, he was escorted for two miles by the local band and such shouting and hurrahing as he had never heard before, everybody seeming fairly wild with joyous excitement.

"Well, Budd," said Zig-Zag, when at last the final yell of the demonstrative admirers had died away behind them, "I can't say that I am sorry to part with the twin Bossvilles."

"B'gosh! me, too."

After leaving the Bossvilles, Zig-Zag found himself entering a more thickly settled region, where the people seemed more prosperous.

He entertained to full houses for a week, having remarkable weather, considering the rapid approach of winter.

He was still mystified and somewhat worried over the

continued appearances of Professor Wiswell's double, for we know of no better name to give the mysterious person, who, about every other night, was to be seen near the entrance to the hall, an earnest observer of the passing scene.

He never offered to address Zig-Zag, while the latter did not think it best to notice him.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed our hero to Budd, one morning. "Here is a letter from Mr. Benton, and the mystery of that box you saw Steerly carrying off has been solved. It has been found. But it wasn't of as much account as was expected, for it was filled with some old clothes of Mr. Wiswell's and other articles belonging to him, of but little value. Still, it is a link in the chain of evidence against that villain, John Steerly, or Andrew Marlow, as I suppose I ought to call him.

"By the way, that reminds me that we are to go tomorrow to Howland, the home of Mrs. Marlow. I must be sure and see her, for somehow I can only think of her as a dear friend. I know she is a good woman."

Howland is a prosperous town, and has one of the prettiest villages to be found in New England. As the

hour drew near for the opening of the evening's entertainment, the crowd began to collect at the spacious hall.

"It is going to be a good night for us," said Zig-Zag. "But I have got to return to our stopping place for something I have forgotten, and I guess you had better go with me."

The evening was quite dark, and, as they approached the house, it was wrapped in gloom, the owner and his family having already gone to the hall.

They had got within a few rods of the dwelling, when Zig-Zag fancied he saw some one climbing into the window opening from the room which had been assigned to them during their stay.

"Some one is breaking into the house!" exclaimed the young conjurer. "Quick, Budd! let us see who it is."

CHAPTER XXX.

AN AMAZING REVELATION.

The room assigned to Zig-Zag and his fellow-traveler was on the first floor, and, as they came up the road, they were in sight of one of the windows opening from the apartment.

As they approached, they soon saw that this was open, though no one could be seen about the place.

No light was burning in the house.

"I am sure I saw some one climb in through that window," whispered Zig-Zag, as they paused a short distance away. "How quiet it is about the premises!"

"If there is anybody there, he is asleep——"

"Hist!" warned Zig-Zag. "I am pretty sure I heard some one move then. Let us creep a little nearer and watch and wait a minute."

He had already begun to crawl forward on his hands and knees, Budd following slowly after him.

Seeing a clump of bushes growing near the corner of the house, Zig-Zag shaped his course in that direction,

barely reaching the spot when the dark outlines of a man's figure appeared in the window.

"He's coming!" whispered Zig-Zag; "help me catch him."

Without stepping to count the odds, Zig-Zag, suddenly rising to his feet, darted swiftly toward the escaping robber.

His face turned the other way, the latter did not see the young conjurer until he was close upon him, when an oath left his lips and an object he was carrying in his hand slipped and fell to the ground.

Zig-Zag saw at a glance that it was the mahogany box once belonging to Professor Wiswell.

The next moment he was more surprised to recognize the escaping housebreaker as John Steerly.

This discovery, however, did not deter Zig-Zag from seizing hold of the culprit, as he paused for a moment upon the window sill, bewildered by the unexpected appearance of our hero.

"You are my prisoner!" cried Zig-Zag, clutching upon his victim with all the strength he could muster. "Quick, Budd, lend a hand."

"Let go of me, or I will kill you!" panted Steerly, as he struggled to break from the grasp of his assailant.

By that time Budd had reached the spot, and the capture of Steerly seemed certain. But he was a muscular man, and young Newbegin had barely caught hold of him, when he planted one of his feet in the latter's stomach with such force that he sent him to the ground, doubled up like a jackknife.

"Ki-yi! ki-yi!" shrieked Budd. "I'm killed and buried!" while he rolled to and fro in great agony.

Zig-Zag still maintained his grip upon the robber, and twice he came near throwing him to the earth, but the other's superior strength began to prove too much for him.

"Let go, you little bulldog!" gritted Steerly, writhing and twisting until he had freed his right arm so that he could raise the member and deal Zig-Zag a furious blow on the side of the head.

At that moment our hero had hurled him back against the side of the house, but the fearful stroke, dealt with such unerring precision and force, sent him reeling backward, his hands losing their hold upon the desperate man.

"I'll learn you how to meddle with me!" exclaimed

Steerly, about to repeat his attack upon the youth, when a voice from the house cried:

“What is up, there? Who’s dead?”

Steerly realized that Budd’s cries had aroused the occupants of the dwelling, and that he must escape at once if at all.

Without further delay, therefore, he started away from the place at the top of his speed, forgetting, in his excitement, the box which had cost him so much trouble.

Budd’s outcries would have proved to any one that he was far from being anything but alive, and, as Steerly rushed past him, he bounded up to lock his long arms about the villain’s waist.

“Hi, Zig! give us a lift!” sputtered Budd, as he held his victim in spite of the other’s vigorous kicking and headlong attempts to break away.

At that moment the door on the opposite side of the house was flung open with a slam, and Steerly knew that some one was coming to the boys’ assistance. He redoubled his efforts, fairly dragging Budd across the yard, until, with a furious wrench, he tore himself free, to quickly disappear in the darkness.

"What's up?" asked Mr. Gordon, reaching the scene at that moment.

Zig-Zag had recovered enough to explain, in a few words, the attempted robbery.

"Zounds, you don't say. Why, that was the most audacious thing I ever heard of. Why, we haven't been out of the house more than ten minutes, for we had all gone down to the show. But I found I had forgotten my pocketbook, so I came back after it. Did he get anything?"

"I think not, sir. He seemed to be after a box I have in my possession, and which used to belong to my guardian. He is an old enemy of mine, but, if I am not mistaken, known in this town. His right name is Andrew Marlow."

"Great Scott! you don't say. But I supposed he was dead long ago. If justice had had her dues, he would have stretched hemp long before this, for a bigger rascal never wore shoe leather. You are hurt?"

"Not seriously. He gave me a little clip on the side of the head, but I shall soon get over that. I think I will go in the house and wash off this blood, when I must

hasten to the hall, for it is already past the hour I was to begin. Here, Budd, take this box up to the room and put it into my trunk."

Then the three entered the house, Mr. Gordon leaving the boys to look after themselves, while he found his pocketbook and started back to the hall.

Zig-Zag had scarcely finished his toilet, when Budd rushed breathlessly into the room, crying:

"It's bu'sted open, Zig! Must have got split when Cowly dropped it. See! it is filled in between the partitions with a lot of papers and documents."

"Broken open! Filled with papers, Budd? Let me see."

Seizing the object with a trembling hand, he quickly saw that the box had been made with a false bottom, and that the space between the two was filled, as Budd had said, with official-looking documents.

"They are Professor Wiswell's private papers, which we have been looking for so long!" cried Zig-Zag, excitedly. "I know now what he meant by the inside of the mahogany box. This is the grandest discovery we have ever made, Budd."

"B'gosh! I guess so. Say, Zig, the more you get acquainted with me, the more you know me."

"Here's the whole story of Mr. Wiswell's life!" said Zig-Zag, unheeding his companion. "It is a remarkable story, too. I understand what was mystery to me before. Poor, noble man! I like him better than ever. How strange! and to think—the wretch! Why, Budd! I can hardly keep my senses enough to read it, it is so strange and startling. I will tell you all about it as soon as we get back from the hall; but I must not delay any longer, for it is nearly eight o'clock. As I live, I am so excited I do not believe I can do a thing to-night."

"I shall take this precious box and these papers with me. They must not leave my sight again. To think that after all I am on the right track!"

Zig-Zag and his companion found the hall well filled with an anxious audience, Mr. Gordon having explained in part the cause of the boy conjurer's non-appearance.

He was greeted with a hearty cheer, which did much toward restoring his usual self-control on such occasions.

He was both pleased and surprised to recognize Mrs. Marlow among his guests, and, as he stepped upon the

platform, she bowed graciously to him, an acknowledgment he gladly returned.

As he began his opening address and glanced over the mass of faces upturned to him, he was hardly surprised to discover in the farther part of the house the person who seemed to haunt him of late. The strange man's gaze was fixed so intently upon him that he for a moment faltered in his speech.

"With all this excitement upon my mind, I shall fail to-night," he thought. "I can't get it out of my mind. How beautiful Mrs. Marlow looks! She cannot know that he is in town."

With such thoughts as these in his mind, Zig-Zag opened his entertainment; and, if he hesitated at first, he soon forgot everything else in the excitement of his work, while he swayed the crowd at his will, ever and anon calling forth a rousing cheer at the miracles he performed.

He was approaching the last act in his series of marvels, when, looking across the hall, he was startled to see John Steerly standing head and shoulders above all the rest, and with a revolver in his right hand, leveled at him!

“Curse you!” shrieked the desperate wretch, “you have baffled me so far; see if you can escape that!”

The frenzied words were closely followed by a sharp report, and, throwing up his arms as he fell backward upon the stage, Zig-Zag cried:

“I am shot!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LONG-LOST.

Excitement of the wildest kind followed.

Men shouted, women shrieked and fainted, while children sat pale and terrified.

Some of those nearest to the assassin sprang forward to attempt his capture, but brandishing his firearm the wretch bounded out of the door.

“A thousand dollars to the man who captures him, dead or alive!” cried the sheriff of Howland, excitedly, rushing in pursuit of the fugitive, followed by a score of determined men.

Meanwhile Zig-Zag had not been unnoticed.

Mrs. Marlow was the first to reach his side, and she bent over him to learn the extent of his injuries.

“Is he dead?” asked one of the anxious spectators.

“I think not. No, he breathes! There is blood upon his arm, but the wound is not more than a scratch. He opens his eyes. He lives. I am so glad.”

Mrs. Marlow was holding Zig-Zag’s head in her lap, while she gently brushed her hand across his brow.

"Poor boy! it is nothing serious, I hope. You are among friends."

In the excitement of the situation no one was certain of what he or she did. But fortunately a doctor was in the house, and he came forward at once.

Before he had reached the platform, however, Zig-Zag had started to a sitting posture, and was perhaps the calmest one there.

"There is a pain in my side," he said; "but I do not think I am very hard hit. The ball seemed to strike me there, and then it glanced off."

This proved to be the case, a silver piece in his vest pocket having saved his life. The slight wound on his arm must have been made by the bullet as it turned from its mark.

Mrs. Marlow was greatly affected, but a new actor upon the scene caused a sudden change in the aspect of affairs.

He was the man who had aroused such an intense interest with Zig-Zag in appearing so much like Watterson Wiswell.

As he approached the scene, he paused abruptly at the

sight of her who was still caressing the fevered brow of the boy conjurer, and a low cry came from his lips.

Then she looked up, and their eyes met. And while they looked upon each other what seemed a long time to the spectators, he grew pale and his hand sought his brow, as if he would brush away something which had come over his gaze. She threw out her arms, and staggering forward, cried:

“James—my husband! back from the grave!”

She would have fallen upon the stage had not some one caught her in his arms, where she lay limp and lifeless. He stood like one in a dream, speechless, motionless.

“Professor Wiswell,” exclaimed Zig-Zag, “alive after all.”

Without a word, the other opened his arms and folded the boy conjurer to his breast.

Mrs. Marlow awoke from one swoon to sink into another, and as soon as possible she was conveyed to her home, where every care was given her that kind friends could bestow.

About this time the news came that Steerly, or Mar-

low, as he should be called, had been captured. But in his desperation the hunted man had shot himself, and his hours on earth were numbered. In fact, it did not seem possible for him to live until morning.

Zig-Zag and Professor Wiswell were told this as they were talking together and explaining to each other what had happened since they had been separated so strangely at Glimmerton.

“Shall we go and see him?” asked the latter.

Our hero nodded assent, when they repaired at once to the house where the dying man was eking out his last miserable moments.

We think that a sort of summing up of that night's following events and conversations, which were kept up till the rosy light of another day seemed to foretell brighter prospects for those whose fortunes we have been portraying, will be the most satisfactory way to get at the kernel of the mystery.

Notwithstanding the evidence which seemed so conclusive at the time, Professor Wiswell had not died from the effects of the poison administered by Andrew Marlow, alias Steerly. The drug had thrown him into a sort

of stupor, from which he had partially recovered in the night, to wander off in a semi-unconscious state. Nor did he recover from that singular state of mind, and though physically as well as ever, all the past was a blank to him. It was a case of lost identity, of which there are many instances of men leaving their homes and families to wander off, and under assumed names to live for weeks or months, and in one circumstance of which we know to be gone eight years. After a time their intellects would suddenly become clear, when they would return to their homes, but unable to tell where they had been or what they had done.

He, as we have seen, went to Haford, where Zig-Zag first saw, as he thought, a man who looked like him, for he could not realize his guardian was alive. From that time Professor Wiswell had a strange desire to follow our hero, though he shrank from meeting him face to face.

But now the spell was broken, and in the happiness of that reunion the latter had no desire to withhold longer the secret of his life, and he repeated in detail that which Zig-Zag had read in the manuscript found in the mahogany box.

When a young man, James Stanton, or Watterson Wiswell, as he called himself later in life, married Mary Holly and one child was born to them. Soon after Mr. Stanton was called to India upon business, and cast away upon the voyage, to meet with many perils and hardships. It was years before he returned, so long, in fact, that his wife, supposing he was dead, married again, her second husband being Andrew Marlow.

Like Enoch Arden, James Stanton came back, found another in his place, missed his baby boy, and rather than to break into this apparently happy home, went his way again a wanderer. Something of his feelings were described in the sheet of paper Zig-Zag found at Hotel Glenwood.

Changing his name from that time, he devoted his life and study to the profession of a conjurer, to become one of the most successful who ever waved the magic wand over an audience.

He did not know Steerly was the undeserving husband for whom he had sacrificed the highest hopes of his life, though the other must have learned an inkling of the truth later on.

“And now I must seek her,” he said. “Oh, can it be possible that after all these long, weary years I am to be rewarded for something of what I have suffered? Come with me, my boy; I cannot bear to have you go out of my sight. You seem dearer to me than ever.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST.

The joy of that reunion between the long separated ones was too sacred to be told by a third person. Zig-Zag turned away with tears in his eyes, but they were tears of happiness for those toward whom he was drawn by an irresistible affinity. Was it an indication of what was to follow?

Zig-Zag had not long been apart from his friends, when he was asked to join them. Then anxious questioning followed, until Mrs. Stanton exclaimed:

“My mother’s heart told me it was so from the first. Charlie, my boy! come to your mother’s arms. Lost these many years, but found at last.”

“Ay, Mary,” said the happy man. “I had the better of you, for I had him with me, though I did not dream it.”

Zig-Zag could not understand at first that he had found a father and mother, but it was made clear to him in the end. It seemed Mrs. Stanton, in her grief for her missing husband, had started to go to India in search of him, taking Charlie with her. But the worst of misfor-

tunes fell to her lot, and in London she was separated from her child, and did not find him. By a strange fatality he for whom she was in search was in that city at that time, and rescued their boy from death, as was told at the beginning of our story. He had not seen Zig-Zag since he was a babe, so it was no wonder he did not know him. Had he known the truth he could not have been kinder to the boy.

Of their wanderings the reader must have a sufficient understanding. Mr. Stanton hastened to his home, to find another there in his place, and learning that his little boy was dead, as everybody supposed, he reluctantly resolved to continue himself dead to the world and to her who had been dearest to him.

Andrew Marlow soon proved himself to be the villain he was, and fled from Howland, to fall in at last, as if by a strange fatality, with Mr. Stanton.

Learning the other's life secret, the plotter then resolved to get possession of the property which the conjurer had accumulated. In this he was frustrated, so far as to be unable to find the key which unlocked the mystery; in other words, the papers so cleverly hidden in the mahogany box. Then, losing the little trunk under the cir-

cumstances we have described, he followed Zig-Zag, vowing vengeance if nothing else against him. Of course, he had formed the dastardly plan of wrecking the stage, whereby he hoped to kill not only Zig-Zag, but Mrs. Marlow. He hired the men at Bossville to drown our hero, as well as changing the dates for the shows so as to make trouble for the boy conjurer.

Baffled at last, he passed that night to that higher court, there to pay the penalty of his crimes.

These explanations will doubtless be sufficient for the reader to understand the different situations of our friends.

It will be remembered that Zig-Zag found a third sheet of paper containing the fragment of another's story, among those dropped by Steerly at Sinclair Hall. The writer of the same had been a friend of Mr. Stanton's, who had been arrested for a crime of which he was innocent and imprisoned, to eventually regain his freedom. As he has nothing further to do with the characters of our story, it is not necessary to say more concerning him.

As Zig-Zag was advertised to appear the following evening in an adjoining town, it was necessary for him to leave his new-found home for that purpose. It is need-

less for us to say that he had never found it so hard for him to start out as at that time. But he did so, and continued "on the road," until he had filled all of his engagements. Budd, of course, going with him.

After that Zig-Zag went to his home, while Budd, with a generous sum of money in his pockets, went back to Canterbury, where he made himself quite a hero in reciting the thrilling parts he had performed.

In closing, we might give detailed descriptions of the secret of the many feats of legerdemain and sleight-of-hand performed by our hero were it not for betraying the good faith of those whom we have promised to protect. We have, however, given enough of insight into many of them, so a bright boy could, if he wished, perform creditably. To become a successful conjurer requires a pleasing appearance, a glib tongue, quick action, and perfect control over one's self. Very much depends upon the power of the eye, and never to let the audience see what your hands are doing.

Besides these personal qualifications, to perform any of the elaborate tricks requires suitable apparatus, which is quite expensive.

With being an adept conjurer, Zig-Zag was also one of

the best ventriloquists that ever stood before an audience. This gift helped him often when the cunning of his hands failed. This was well shown in his illusion of the dog in the air at Haford. Several other times it served him a good purpose.

Zig-Zag, or Charles Stanton, as he is now called, has entered upon the profession of a physician, and with a happy home, his aged father and mother still with him, is amply satisfied with his lot in life.

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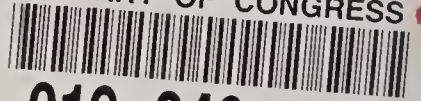
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